

COLLECTED POEMS

1st	Edition—	Sept. 1910.
2nd	"	Feb. 1911.
3rd	"	June 1912.
4th	"	Dec. 1913.
5th	"	Nov. 1914.
6th	"	Feb. 1916.
7th	"	Jan. 1917.
8th	"	Nov. 1917.
9th	"	June 1918.
10th	"	Oct. 1919.
11th	"	Dec. 1920.
12th	"	Sept. 1921.
13th	"	April 1922.
14th	"	Dec. 1922.
15th	"	Feb. 1925.
16th	"	Jan. 1926.
17th	"	Sept. 1927.

COLLECTED POEMS

BY

ALFRED NOYES

VOL. I.

THE LOOM OF YEARS
THE FLOWER OF OLD JAPAN
THE FOREST OF WILD THYME
FORTY SINGING SEAMEN
ROBIN HOOD

NEW EDITION

William Blackwood & Sons Ltd.
Edinburgh and London
1928

*NOTE TO THE
EIGHTEENTH EDITION.*

THE poems in this first volume of the author's *Collected Poems* are all, in a sense, *juvenilia*; and they are now reprinted with many revisions which the author has long desired to make. A few early poems, either unpublished or (like *Robin Hood*) published out of their order, are now restored to their right place.

CONTENTS.

	PAGE
AT DUSK	1
IN OTHER WORLDS	3
THE LOOM OF YEARS	8
A TRIPLE BALLAD OF OLD JAPAN	10
HAUNTED IN OLD JAPAN	13
THE SYMBOLIST	15
THE MYSTIC	17
THE FLOWER OF OLD JAPAN	19
APES AND IVORY	43
SHERWOOD	45
THE WORLD'S MAY	48
BUCCANEER DAYS	51
SONG OF THE WOODEN-LEGGED FIDDLER	54
EARTH-BOUND	56
ART, THE HERALD	58
THE BARREL-ORGAN	59
MUSIC AND MEMORY	64
TRIOLET	65
THE PARADOX	66
THE FOREST OF WILD THYME	72

FORTY SINGING SEAMEN	125
IN TIME OF WAR	131
THE DEATH OF CHOPIN	136
IN CLOAK OF GRAY	140
A RIDE FOR THE QUEEN	142
THE HIGHWAYMAN	145
THE HAUNTED PALACE	151
SUMMER	155
BLACKBERRIES	158
AT DAWN	159
THE SWIMMER'S RACE	162
THE APHRODITE OF MELOS	165
SONG (AFTER THE FRENCH OF ROSTAND)	166
THE NET OF VULCAN	167
NIOBE	168
ON A RAILWAY PLATFORM	170
OXFORD REVISITED	171
THE THREE SHIPS	173
SLUMBER-SONGS OF THE MADONNA	175
IN THE COOL OF THE EVENING	181
A ROUNDHEAD'S RALLYING SONG	183
ROBIN HOOD	184

COLLECTED POEMS.



AT DUSK.

DARK-EYED Sleep, tiptoe nigh,
Touched with colours of the sky.
Airs of elf-land, dim and gay,
Round her breathing slumber stray.

Hesper, let her dusky hair,
Brush one rosy shoulder bare,
So that earth may show a light
Beautiful as thine to-night.

Love—love—with wings apart
Fold us to thy heavenly heart,
Drown us in thy shining bliss,
While, on earth, our shadows kiss.

Dreams cloud her dawning eyes.
Let her wake, as music dies,
Wondering if indeed it were
But a dream that stole from her,

Drifting moth or drowsy bee
Borne to earth in ecstasy,
Honey-laden from that star
Where the world's lost Edens are.

IN OTHER WORLDS.

"Few, few only are there left, with whom that world of memory is duly present."

PHÆDRUS.

I.

WHOSE was the radiant face,
That bent above me, from that happy place ?
Whose the strange voice that whispered through the flow
Of waves and mountain fir-woods, *It is I,*
Love that was never born, and cannot die.
Ask thine own answering soul if thou would'st know
Who speaks to thee, through earth and sea and sky.

II.

In other worlds I loved you, long ago.
Love that hath no beginning hath no end.
The sea-wind in my fir-wood whispers low,
In other worlds I loved you, long ago.
The sea-waves murmur, and the mountains know
The message that the setting sun shall send :
In other worlds I loved you, long ago.
Love that hath no beginning hath no end.

III.

Only two children, wandering by that sea
 Listened and understood. The breathless West
 Burned like the Phoenix in its incense-tree

Beyond Cathay, in Araby the Blest.
 Above the hill-ferns, the deep heather-bloom
 From crag to crag, along each broken crest,

Rolled a dim sea of colour and fragrant gloom
 Whose billows rocked the drowsy honey-bee
 Round saffron isles of nut-sweet gorse and broom

.

The hawk dropped down into the pine-forest ;
 And, far below, the skylark ruffled her wings
 Blossom-wise, over her clover-inwoven nest.

They came. They heard the song that memory sings,
 Two bare-foot children, by the salt sea spray,
 Avatars of the sweetness of lost Springs

And, in their eyes, a memory—far away.

.

Once, once upon a time ; and, o'er and o'er
 As aye the *Happy Ever After* came
 The enchanted waves lavished their sacrie lore,

And tossed a rainbow, like a dying flame
 Over their foam-kissed feet on that lost shore.
 O, waves that break, and return, and are ever the same,
 Where are they flown ? Will they return no more ?

IV.

And God sighed in the sunset ; and the sea
 Moved with His breath against the coasts of Time,
Breathing His law and heaven's tranquillity
Through waves that rose in rhythm and broke in rhyme
 (Deep music that man's heart has never learned !)
Until it seemed as though the Love sublime
Uttered itself. The moon rose. The waves burned
 With little flaming crests of rose and green.
Then, like an opal river, the tide returned,
Flowing out of the sunset's pure serene,
 With mirrored tints of Dawn in its dark breast
Like glimmering thoughts of lovelier worlds unseen.
Grief, like a sea-bird, drifted down to rest ;
And all earth's discords, all this dark world's wrong,
 Like molten notes of music were resolved
Into the bliss of Love's transcendent song ;
Through which the suns and moons and stars revolved
 According to the Spirit's deep decree,
Till Time was but a tide of intervolved
And interweaving worlds of harmony.
 In other worlds I loved you, long ago,
The ethereal citoles breathed across the sea,
And unseen citerns answered, throbbing low
 Where airs of sunset into the sunrise wend,
In other worlds I loved you, long ago.
 Love that hath no beginning hath no end.

V.

Only two lovers, wandering by that sea
Listened and understood. The mystery
Of silent earth and sky was like a word
Uttered, but all unheard ;
Uttered by every glistening cloud and leaf
With all the immortal glory of mortal grief ;
While every wave that out of the sunset rolled
To break in music on that darkening shore
Seemed telling, strangely telling, evermore,
A story that must still remain untold :

*Love, of whom Life had birth,
See, now, is Death not sweet ?
Love, is this heaven or earth ?
Both are beneath thy feet.*

Nay, both within thy heart !
O, Love, the glory nears.
The veils of Time are riven apart.
The Rose of Heaven appears.

What rhythmic ebb and flow
Still rules the blissful throng
That through its radiant mazes go
Like pangs of visible song ?

Do they still taste of death,
As music breathes farewell,
That its own soul, and what it saith,
In its own form may dwell ?

So that when Love is fain
To touch the silent strings,
At once, from their dark sleep again
Awake the ecstatic wings.

Love, of whom Death had birth,
See now, is Life not sweet ?
Love, is this heaven or earth ?
Both are beneath thy feet.

In other worlds I loved you, long ago.

Love that hath no beginning hath no end.
The may-boughs murmur, in the moon's first glow,
In other worlds I loved you, long ago.

The fir-woods whisper, and the sea-waves know
The message that the deepening dawn shall send :
In other worlds I loved you, long ago.

Love that hath no beginning hath no end.

THE LOOM OF YEARS.

IN the light of the silent stars that shine on the struggling
 sea ;
 In the song of the oldest wind to the youngest leaf on the
 tree ;
 Under the ripple of laughter, deep in the tide of tears,
 I hear the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the Web of
 Years.

The withering glory of autumn is drifted into the mould
 To stain the petals of April with purple and white and
 gold.
 The sea-washed hills of boyhood, the fir-woods and the
 fern,
 Fade, and in far remembrance, oh, strong as Death,
 return.

Our visions are bound within us. We are one with all
 we have lost.
 O, rhythmic shuttle returning, from cosmic coast to
 coast,
 Never your wide weft loses one thread of our hopes and
 fears
 As it throbs through the Loom of the Weaver that weaves
 the Web of Years.

The crosiers of the fern, and the crown, the crown of the
rose,

Pass with our hearts to the Silence where the wings of
music close ;

Pass and pass to the Timeless that ends our griefs and
wars ;

Pass and pass to the Darkness that made the suns and
stars ;

Till woven and one for ever, through every depth and
height,

One with the dust and the sorrow of this our mortal
night,

One with the Light that triumphs beyond the light of
the spheres,

We come from the Loom of the Weaver that weaves the
Web of Years.

A TRIPLE BALLAD OF OLD JAPAN.

IN Old Japan, by creek and bay,
 The blue plum-blossoms blow,
 Where birds with sea-blue plumage gay
 Thro' sea-blue branches go :
 Dragons are coiling down below
 Like dragons on a fan ;
 And pig-tailed sailors lurching slow
 Thro' streets of Old Japan.

There, in the dim blue death of day
 Where white tea-roses grow,
 Petals and scents are strewn astray
 Till night be sweet enow,
 Then lovers wander whispering low
 As only lovers can,
 Where rosy paper lanterns glow
 Thro' streets of Old Japan.

From Wonderland to Yea-or-Nay
 The junks of Weal-and-Woe
 Dream on the purple water-way
 Nor ever meet a foe ;
 Though still, with stiff mustachio
 And crookéd ataghan,
 Their pirates guard with pomp and show
 The ships of Old Japan.

That land is very far away,
We lost it long ago !
No fairies ride the cherry spray,
No witches mop and mow,
The violet wells have ceased to flow ;
And oh, how faint and wan
The dawn on Fujiyama's snow,
The peak of Old Japan.

Half smilingly our hearts delay,
Half mournfully forgo
The blue fantastic twisted day
When faithful Konojo,
For small white Lily Hasu-ko
Knelt in the Butsudan,
And her tomb opened to bestrow
Lilies thro' Old Japan.

There was a game they used to play
I' the San-ju-san-jen Dō,
They filled a little lacquer tray
With powders in a row,
Dry dust of flowers from Tashiro
To Mount Daimugenzan,
Dry little heaps of dust, but oh,
They breathed of Old Japan.

Then knights in blue and gold array
Would on their thumbs bestow
A pinch from every heap and say,
With many a *hum* and *ho*,
What blossoms, nodding to and fro
For joy of maid or man,
Conceived the scents that puzzled so
The brains of Old Japan.

Dry dust of blossoms, dim and gray,
Lost on the wind? Ah, no,
Hark, from yon clump of English may,
A cherub's mocking crow,
A sudden twang, a sweet, swift throe,
As Daisy trips by Dan,
And careless Cupid drops his bow
And laughs—from Old Japan.

*There, in the dim blue death of day
Where white tea-roses grow,
Petals and scents are strewn astray
Till night be sweet enow,
Then lovers wander, whispering low
As only lovers can,
Where rosy paper lanterns glow
Thro' streets of Old Japan.*

.

HAUNTED IN OLD JAPAN.

MUSIC of the star-light, shimmering on the sea,
 Mirror me no longer in the dusk of memory.
 Dim and white the rose-leaves drift along the shore.
 Wind among the roses, blow no more.

*All along the purple creek, lit with silver foam,
 Now the tide is ebbing out, cry no more of home.
 Soft beyond the cherry-trees, o'er the dim lagoon,
 Dawns the crimson lantern of the large low moon.*

We that chose the wisdom that triumphs for an hour ;
 We that let the flower of youth perish like a flower ;
 We for whom the wandering star darkened every hearth ;
 We that, in our quest of heaven, only girdled earth ;

We that used our compasses to steer our ships astray ;
 We that, in our darkness, railed against the day ;
 Watch the scattered rose-leaves drift along the shore.
 Wind among the roses, blow no more.

Lonely starry faces, wonderful and white,
 Yearning with a cry across the dim sweet night,
 All our dreams are blown adrift as flowers before a fan.
 All our hearts are haunted in the heart of Old Japan.

Haunted ; haunted ; haunted ;—we that mocked and
sinned

Hear the phantom voices withering down the wind ;
See the Rose of Paradise drift along the shore.

Wind among the roses, blow no more.

*All along the purple creek, lit with silver foam,
Now the tide is flowing in, cry no more of home.
Soft beyond the cherry-trees, o'er the dim lagoon,
Dawns the crimson lantern of the large low moon.*

THE SYMBOLIST.

HELP me to seek that unknown land
 I kneel before the shrine.
 Help me to feel the hidden hand
 That ever holdeth mine.

I kneel before the Word. I kneel
 Before the Cross of flame.
 I cry, as thro' the gloom I steal,
 The glory of the Name.

Help me to mourn, and I shall love.
 What grief is like to mine ?
 Crown me with thorn, the stars above
 Shall in the circlet shine.

The Temple opens wide : none sees
 The love, the dream, the light !
 O, blind and finite, are not these
 Blinding and infinite ?

The veil, the veil is rent : the skies
 Are white with wings of fire,
 Where victim souls triumphant rise
 In torment of desire.

Help me to seek : I would not find,
For when I find I know
I shall have clasped the hollow wind
And built a house of snow.

THE MYSTIC.

WITH wounds out-reddening every moon-washed rose
King Love went through earth's garden-close.

From that first gate of birth in the golden gloom,
I traced Him. Thorns had frayed His garment's hem,
And torn His flesh. I marked, I followed them
Down to that threshold of—the tomb ?

And there Love vanished, yet I entered ! Night
And Doubt mocked at the dwindling light.

Strange claw-like hands flung me their shadowy hate.
I clomb the dreadful stairways of desire
Between a thousand eyes and wings of fire
And knocked upon the second Gate.

The second Gate ! When, like a warrior helmed,
In battle on battle overwhelmed,

Under the sensuous world my soul lay prone,
Blinded and stunned by stars and flowers and trees,
Did I not struggle in triumph to my knees
And find me alone, there, with the Alone ?

Did earth not flee before me, when the breath
Of worship smote her with strange death,

Withered her gilded garment, broke her sword,
Shattered her graven images and smote
All her light sorrows thro' the breast and throat,
Whose death-cry crowned me God and Lord ?

All-seeing God ! Had tears not purged my sight ?
I saw the myriad gates of Light

Opening and shutting in each way-side flower,
And like a sentinel in the gleam of each,
Death, whispering in some strange eternal speech
To every passing hour.

The second Gate ? Was I not born to pass
A million ? Though the skies be brass

And the earth iron, shall I not win thro' all ?
Shall I who made the infinite heavens my mark
Shrink from this first wild horror of the dark,
These formless gulfs, these glooms that crawl ?

Never was mine that easy faithless hope
Which makes all life one flowery slope

To heaven ! Mine be the vast assaults of doom,
Trumpets, defeats, red anguish, age-long strife,
Ten million deaths, ten million gates to life,
The insurgent heart that bursts the tomb.

It will not open ! Through the bars I see
The glory and the mystery

Wind upward ever ! The earth-dawn breaks ! I bleed
With beating here for entrance. Hark, O hark,
Love, Love, return and give me the great Dark,
Which is the Light of Life indeed.

THE FLOWER OF OLD JAPAN.

DEDICATED TO
CAROL, A LITTLE MAIDEN OF MIYAKO.

PERSONS OF THE TALE.

OURSELVES,
THE TALL THIN MAN.

THE DWARF BEHIND THE CROOKED
PLUM-TREE.
CREEPING SIN.

Pirates, Mandarins, Bonzes, Jugglers, Merchants, Ghastroi, &c.

PRELUDE.

A RAMBLING cherry-petalled stream ;
A bridge of pale bamboo ;
A path that seemed a twisted dream
Where everything came true ;
A paper-lanterned garden-house,
With jutting eaves between the boughs ;
And slant-eyed elves in blue,
With soft slip-slapping heels and toes
Dancing before the Daimyos.

" *And is it Old Japan ?* " you cry,—

" *That half-remembered place ?* "

I see beneath an English sky

A child with brooding face.

The fairy realm he chose to build
And paint with any hues he willed
Is all I strive to trace,
Where odds and ends of memory smile
Like bits of heaven, through clouds awhile.

And some for charts and maps would call ;
But here, beside the fire,
The kakemono on the wall
Is all that we require.
A chanty piped by bosun Lear
May float around us while we steer
Our hearts to their desire,—
That nonsense-land, beyond the sun,
Where West and East, at last, are one.

Then let the rigging hum the tales
That Tusitala told,
When first we spread our purple sails
In quest of pirate gold ;
For, though he waved us all good-bye
Beneath the deep Samoan sky,
He left us blithe and bold,
And hailed, across a darker main,
The shadowy hills of home again.

So we, who now adventure far
Beyond the singing foam,
May see, in every dipping star,
The harbour-lights of home ;
And, finding still, as all have found,
That every ship is homeward bound,
(For none could ever roam
A sea too wide for heaven to span)
Sail on—sail on—to Old Japan.

PART I.—EMBARKATION.

WHEN the firelight, red and clear,
 Flutters in the black wet pane,
It is very good to hear
 Howling winds and trotting rain :
It is very good indeed,
 When the nights are dark and cold,
Near the friendly hearth to read
 Tales of ghosts and buried gold.

So with cosy toes and hands
 Once, we let our fancy stray
Into far mysterious lands
 Coloured like a cherry-spray ;
Hearing from our fire-lit nook
 Whispers of enchanted seas
Through the rustling of the book
 Spread upon our toasted knees.

Something haunted us that night
 Like a half-remembered name.
Worn old pages in that light
 Seemed the same, yet not the same.
Curling in the pleasant heat
 Smoothly as a shell-shaped fan,
Ah, they breathed and smelt so sweet
 When we turned to Old Japan !

All at once we thought we heard
Some one tapping on the wall,
Tapping, tapping like a bird.
Then a panel seemed to fall
Quietly ; and a tall thin man
Stepped into the glimmering room,
And he held a painted fan,
And he waved it in the gloom.

Then he told us of a land
Cradled in a wizard sea,
And he waved his thin white hand
Like a flower, melodiously ;
While a wrinkle-eyed macaw
Perched upon his pointed head ;
And, as in a dream, we saw
All the curious things he said.

Tucked in tiny palanquins
Magically swinging there
Flowery-kirtled mandarins
Floated through the fragrant air;
Rosy cranes, with legs like pins
Out of Shozan plates took flight
Chasing fish with rainbow fins
Round the room, in pools of light.

" *There,*" he whispered, "*shrined alone,
Watched by secret oval eyes
Burns the Ruby Wishing-Stone,
Darkest of all mysteries.
You may touch it if you dare*"—
Warningly he shook his head—
"*Touch and wish ; and then—beware !
All you wish is yours,*" he said.

Ah, but glorious were the ways
 We might use those magic powers,
Turning tasks to holidays,
 Raining presents down in showers,
Sixpences without an end,
 Crowds of pleasant things to share ;
So we asked our strange new friend
 If he'd kindly lead us there.

Wizardly he waved his fan
 Touched the wall and vanished through.
Tumbling after him we ran
 Ere the gap could close anew.
Down a tunnel dark as night,
 Boldly after him we sped,
For we saw his robe of light
 Fluttering backward as he fled.

Down a secret passage deep
 Under roofs of spidery stairs,
Where the bat-winged nightmares creep,
 And a sheeted phantom glares,
Rushed we, reckless of our fate,
 Where no human watcher stood,
Till we reached a shining gate
 Opening on an elfin wood.

Where the radiant robe had flown
 Borne by swifter feet than ours,
On to Kakemono town,
 Through the wood of monstrous flowers !
Round us, mailed in gold and blue,
 Dragon-flies like peacocks fled.
Butterflies like carpets, too,
 Softly fluttered overhead.

Down the valley, tip-a-toe,
Where the broad-limbed giants lie,
Snoring, as when long ago
Jack on a bean-stalk scaled the sky,
On to Kakemono town
Stole we past old dreams again,
Castles long since battered down,
Dungeons of forgotten pain.

Noonday brooded on the wood.
Evening caught us ere we crept
Where that crooked plum-tree stood
And a dwarf behind it slept.
Round his scraggy throat he wore,
Knotted tight, a scarlet scarf.
Fearfully we watched him snore,
For he seemed a surly dwarf.

Yet, he looked so very small,
He could hardly hurt us much.
We were nearly twice as tall,
So we woke him with a touch
Gently, and in tones polite,
Asked him to direct our path.
Instantly, his eyes grew bright
Prickly green, with gnomish wrath.

He seemed to choke,
And gruffly spoke,
"You're lost. Deny it, if you can!
You want to know
The way to go?
There's no such place as Old Japan.

“ You want to seek—
No, no, don't speak !
You mean you want to steal a fan.
You want to see
The fields of tea ?
They don't grow tea in Old Japan.

“ In China, well,
Perhaps you'd smell
The cherry bloom. That's if you ran
A million miles
And jumped the stiles,
And never dreamed of Old Japan.

“ You'd take away
The ruby, hey ?
I never heard of such a plan !
And what ? Hee ! hee !
You'll never see
A pig-tailed head in Old Japan.

“ Oh, dear me, no !
You'd better go
Straight home again, my little man.
Ah, well, you'll see,
But don't blame me.
I don't believe in Old Japan.”

Then, before we could obey,
O'er our startled heads he cast,
Spider-like, a webby grey
Net that held us prisoned fast.
Round our shouts, he danced and grinned.
It was such a lonely place ;
And he said we should be pinned
In his human beetle-case.

Out he dragged a monstrous box
 From a cave behind the tree.
 It had four and twenty locks,
 Brass ones ; but he'd lost the key ;
 And his nose grew long and pale
 When a voice we knew began
 Drawing nearer through the vale
 Singing songs of Old Japan :

SONG.

*Satin sails in a crimson dawn,
 Over a silvery silken sea ;
 Mists of cherry-bloom softly drawn
 Back from the land where our hearts would be ;
 Clean and bright in the morning light
 Over the ripples the town we knew,
 In elfin state, like a willow-plate,
 Shone, and behind it the hills were blue.*

*There we remembered, the shadows pass
 All day long like dreams in the night.
 There, in the meadows of dim blue grass
 Crimson daisies are ringed with white.
 There the roses flutter their petals.
 Over the meadows they take their flight.
 There the moth that sleepily settles
 Turns to a flower in the warm soft light.*

*There, when the sunset colours the streets,
 Everyone buys at the stalls of bliss,
 Ivory pistols and parakeets,
 And magical old ship's compasses.*

*Everyone's pockets are crammed with gold.
Nobody's heart is worn with care.
Nobody ever grows tired and old,
And nobody talks of bedtime there.*

*There, with a hat like a round white dish
Upside down on each pig-tailed head,
Jugglers offer you snakes and fish,
Dragons, and swords to strike them dead ;
Magical books with marvellous pictures,
Painted pirates and streaming gore ;
And everyone reads, without any strictures,
Tales he remembers for evermore.*

*There, when the dim blue daylight lingers
Listening, and the West grows holy,
Singers crouch with their long white fingers
Floating over the samisen slowly.
Chinese lamps with a peach-soft bloom,
Burn above on the dim blue bough,
While the thin strings gild the gloom
With eerie music. I hear it now !*

*Now ! And at that mighty word,
Holding out his magic fan,
Through the waving flowers appeared,
Taller yet, the tall thin man.
Whimpering low, the crumpled dwarf
Tried to hide behind the tree ;
But his horrid scarlet scarf
Made him very plain to see.*

*Like a soft and smoky cloud
Passed the webby net away.
Flat on earth and squealing loud
Dwarfkin by the plum-tree lay.*

Sternly strode our rescuer near.
Grumly were his words and gruff.
Up he swung the dwarf in the air
By his long and scraggy scruff.

There he kickled whimpering.
Snap! Our rescuer touched the box.
Open with a sudden spring
Clashed the four and twenty locks.
Dump! He crammed the dwarf inside.
Snap! The locks all clattered tight.
Four and twenty times he tried
Whether they were fastened right.

Ah, he led us on our road,
Showed us Kakemono sea.
Then, once more, away he strode
Pointing to the distant quây.
Down the shadowy wharf we came.
Though it hides behind the hill
You will find it just the same,
And the seamen singing still.

There we chose a ship of pearl,
And her milky silken sail
Seemed by magic to unfurl
Filled with a melodious gale.
Over us the skies were dark,
Yet we never needed light.
Like an elfin moon our bark
Glided through the solemn night.

Faintly now our rigging shone,
Iris'd like a web of dew,
All whose threads when night is gone
Dawn shall turn to fire anew.

All our spars like opal gleamed.
Seeds of fern were all our freight.
On the bridge our compass beamed
Softly as a willow-plate.

PART II.—THE RUBY.

WHEN Dawn, with rosy finger-tips,
Drew back the silver veils,
We saw a harbour thronged with ships
And dragon-painted sails ;
And o'er the silken sleeping tide
Between them, drifting down,
Clear as a coloured print we spied
Our Kakemono town. .

Oh, many a milk-white pigeon roams
The purple cherry crops,
The mottled miles of pearly domes,
And blue pagoda tops,
The river with its golden canes
And dark piratic dhows,
To where beyond the twisting vanes
The burning mountain glows.

A snow-peak in the silver skies
Beyond that magic world,
We saw the great volcano rise
With incense o'er it curled,
Whose tiny thread of rose and blue
Has risen since time began,
Before the wings of elf-dom flew
Like moths to Old Japan.

Nobody watched us quietly steer
The pinnacle to the painted pier,
Except one pig-tailed mandarin,
Who sat upon a chest of tea
Pretending not to hear or see !

His hands were very long and thin,
His face was very broad and white ;
And oh, it was a fearful sight
To see him sit alone and grin !

His grin was very sleek and sly.
Timidly we passed him by.

He did not seem at all to care.
So, thinking we were safely past,
We ventured to look back at last.

Oh, dreadful blank !—*He was not there !*
He must have hid behind his chest.
We did not stay to see the rest.

But, as in reckless haste we ran,
We came upon the tall thin man,
Who called to us and waved his fan,

And offered us his palanquin.
He said we must not go alone
To seek the ruby wishing-stone,

Because the white-faced mandarin
Would dog our steps for many a mile,
And sit upon each purple stile
Before we came to it, and smile

And smile. His name was Creeping Sin.

His face would change its shape like clay
(He'd change it twenty times a day.

You never knew him till he sprung.)
He'd watch us till we tried to speak,
Then thrust inside his ghoulisn cheek
His gruesome ooglish tongue ;

And smile at everything we said,
 And sometimes pat us on the head,
 And say that we were very young.
 He was a cousin of the man
 Who said that there was no Japan.

And night and day this Creeping Sin
 Would follow the path of the palanquin ;
 Yet, if we still desired to touch
 The Ruby, we must have no fear,
 Whatever we might see or hear,
 And the tall thin man would take us there.
 He did not fear that Sly One *much*,
 Except perhaps on a moonless night,
 Nor even then if the stars were bright.

.

The black-barred moon was large and low
 When we came to the Forest of Ancient Woe ;
 And over our heads the stars were bright.
 But, through the forest, the path we travelled
 Its phosphorescent aisle unravelled
 In one thin ribbon of dwindling light ;
 And twice and thrice on the fainting track
 We paused to listen. The moon grew black,
 But the coolies' faces glimmered white,
 As the wild woods echoed, in dreadful chorus,
 A laugh that came horribly hopping o'er us,
 Like monstrous frogs, through the murky night.

Then the tall thin man as we swung along
 Sang us an old enchanted song
 That lightened our hearts of their fearful load.
 But, even as the moonlit air grew sweet,
 We heard the pad of stealthy feet
 Dogging us down the thin white road ;

And the song grew heavy again and harsh,
 And the black trees dripped like the fringe of a marsh,
 And a laugh crept out like a shadowy toad.
 And we knew it was neither ghou! nor djinn.
It was Creeping Sin ! It was Creeping Sin !

.

About the close of the second day
 We saw beside the twisted way
 A blue-domed tea-house, bossed with gold.
 Hungry and thirsty we entered in :
 How should we know what Creeping Sin
 Had breathed in that Emperor's ear who sold
 His own dumb soul for an evil jewel
 To the earth-gods, blind and ugly and cruel ? . . .
 We drank sweet tea as his tale was told,
 In a garden of blue chrysanthemums,
 While a drowsy swarming of gongs and drums
 Out of the sunset dreamily rolled.

But, as the murmur nearer drew,
 A fat Moonshee, in a robe of blue,
 Quietly at the gate appeared.
 Did we know that face, with its evil grin ?
Was it Creeping Sin, was it Creeping Sin ?
 He squatted himself on the gate, and sneered.
 Our guide ! Was he sleeping ? We could not wake him,
 With all our efforts to pinch and shake him !

Nearer, nearer the tumult came,
 Till, as a glare of sound and flame,
 Blind from a terrible furnace door
 Blares, or the mouth of a dragon, blazed
 The seething gateway : deaf and dazed
 With the clanging and the wild uproar

We stood. Great beaches of oval eyes
Crowding about us circle-wise,
Filled our hearts with a sick surmise.

Then, as the Red Sea parted asunder,
The multitude clove with a sound of thunder

In two huge billows ; and all was quiet.
Gaunt and black was the palankeen
That came in dreadful state between

The frozen waves of the wild-eyed riot
Curling back from the breathless track
Of the Nameless One who is never seen.

The close-drawn curtains were thick and black ;
But wizened and white was the tall thin man

As he rose in his sleep.

His eyes were closed, his lips were wan,

He crouched like a leopard that dares not leap.

The bearers halted. The tall thin man,
Fearfully dreaming, waved his fan,

With wizard fingers, to and fro ;
While, with a whimper of evil glee,
The Nameless Emperor's mad Moonshee

Drew his dagger. Then, smiling slow,
The tall thin man just whispered a name,
And, over the ground, as he spoke, there came
Tiny circles of soft blue flame.

Like ghosts of flowers they began to glow,
And flow like a moonlit brook between
Our feet and the terrible palankeen.

But the Moonshee wrinkled his long thin eyes,
And sneered, " Have you stolen the strength of the skies ?

Then pour before us a stream of pearl !
Give us the pearl and the gold we know,

And our hearts will be softened and let you go ;
But these are toys for a foolish girl—
These vanishing blossoms—what are they worth ?
They are not so heavy as dust and earth.
Pour before us a stream of pearl ! ”

Then, with a wild strange laugh, our guide
Stretched his arms to the West and cried
Once, and a song came over the sea ;
And all the blossoms of moon-soft fire
Woke and breathed as a wind-swept lyre,
And the garden surged into harmony ;
Till it seemed that the soul of the whole world sung,
And every petal became a tongue
To tell the thoughts of Eternity.

But the Moonshee lifted his painted brows
And stared at the gold on the blue tea-house.
“ Can you clothe your body with dreams ? ” he sneered.
“ If you taught us the truths that we always know
Our heart might be softened and let you go.
Can you tell us the length of a monkey’s beard,
Or the weight of the gems on the Emperor’s fan,
Or the number of parrots in Old Japan ? ”

And again, with a wild strange laugh, our guide
Looked at him ; and he shrunk aside,
Shrivelling like a flame-touched leaf ;
For the delicate blossoms of soft blue fire
Were growing and fluttering higher and higher,
Shaking their petals out, sheaf by sheaf,
Till with disks like shields and stems like towers
Burned that host of miraculous flowers.
. . . Had the Moonshee flown like a midnight thief ?

. . . Yet a thing like a monkey, shrivelled and black,
Chattered and danced as they forced him back.

As the coward chatters for empty pride,
In the face of a foe that he cannot but fear,
It chattered and leapt from side to side,
And its voice rang strangely upon the ear.
As the cry of a wizard that dares not own
Another's brighter and mightier throne ;
As the wrath of a fool that rails aloud
On the fire that burnt him ; the brazen bray
Clamoured and sang o'er the gaping crowd,
And flapped like a gabbling goose away :—

THE CRY OF THE MAD MOONSHEE.

They were wise, they were witty
In Cloud-cuckoo City ;
But minds, at their best, are a species of mud ;
For the highest we know
Must ascend from the low,
Which is why we so frequently drop with a thud.

These blossoms of fire
Which you so much admire
Have sprung out of nothing. They'll wither and fall.
If the wisest of kings
Were to meet with such things
He'd refuse to consider their glories at all.

Consider the proton
Herr Chickenwitz wrote on,
Who said that all objects (including your curls,
Your eyes and your noses)
Were nothing but posies
Of atoms composed of electrical whirls.

They arrange themselves thus
To avoid any fuss
Over anything bigger and better than ME ;
I agree to a monkey,
Of course, or a donkey ;
But when Beauty and Goodness are blazing, I flee.

Would you solve the great riddle,
Distribute your middle,
And then you may prove, without any distress,
If you place your reliance
On orthodox science,
The greater is always derived from the less.

Away, away, as a wild goose flies,
And the stars came out in the trembling skies,
And still the miraculous glory grew
In the garden of blue chrysanthemums,
Till there came a droning of far-off drums,
And the multitude suddenly turned and flew, . . .
A dead ape lay where their feet had been,
And we called for the yellow palankeen,
And the flowers divided, and let us through.

And now, at last, on the narrowing road
A Temple, like a white moon, glowed.
Wistaria clouds around it flowed,
And through its lucid porch there showed
A lantern-spark, a blood-red flame.
It is the Ruby, some one said,
And, though their brown feet ached and bled,
Our coolies ran with lifted head.
Like living fans the gates outspread
And opened as we came.

His eyes were strange. His face was wan.
 But, silently, the tall thin man,
 Fluttering out his turquoise fan,
 Alighted from the palanquin.
 We followed—into the Temple's light,
 And there we saw that its walls so white
 Were made of the wheeling lamps of night ;
 For a myriad spheres, all smooth and bright
 Seemed in its radiant sides to spin ;
 And red, in the midst, like an altar-fire
 Burned the stone of our heart's desire.

We gathered round to stare at it,
 And saw that these strange words were writ
 Beneath it :

Time and Tide go by.
This is the Ruby none can touch.
Many have loved it over-much.
Its fathomless fires flutter and sigh,
Being as images of the flame
That shall make earth and heaven the same
When the last Judgment reddens the sky,
And the world consumes like a burning pall,
Till, where there is nothing, there is All.

We could not understand one word ;
 But, while we looked at it, we heard
 A rustle, light as the flight of a bird,
 And saw that our guide had flown once more.
 And then, as we stood there, all alone,
 A step neared, chilling us to the bone . . .
 Was it Creeping Sin, or a thing unknown ?
 Madly we clutched at the blood-red stone
 And wished—to be back on the willowy shore ;

And, swift as thought, and swifter than fear,
The whole world flashed ; and, behold, we were there.

.
Once more we saw the sunlight glow
On the little twisted town below.
We saw the willowy brooklet flow
Between the blue pagoda towers.
And, at our feet, like a small dark fire,
Burned the stone of our heart's desire ;
So, in the grass, among the flowers,
We sat and wished whatever we chose ;
Oh, swift as a goblin mushroom grows,
Delicious feasts around us rose,
And silver coins came down in showers.
Then, all at once, we knew not why,
The grass and flowers began to die.

Pouf—we could spare them all, we thought ;
And wished for strawberries to be brought,
With cream and sugar. Swift as light
The unseen djinnies brought a dish
As large and luscious as our wish ;
Then—freezing our marrow stiff with fright—
Four large cherry-trees hopped from the hill
And leap-frogged off, at their own sweet will.

We wished them back ; and, instantly,
Two plum-trees rocketed into the sky
Like peacocks through the startled air.
Then stones began to croak like frogs,
And bushes barked at us like dogs,
And a pine-tree roared like a grizzly bear,

And butterflies flapped into silver fish ;
And each wish spoiled another wish,
 Till we threw the stone down in despair ;
For getting whatever you want to get
Is like drinking tea from a fishing net.

So all together, we wished once more
That all should be as it was before.

Home, at last, was our heart's desire ;
And o'er us the whole of the soft blue sky
Flashed like fire as the world went by ;

And, far beneath us, the sea like fire
Flashed in one swift blue brilliant stream,
And the journey was done, like the change in a dream.

.

THE RETURN.

LIKE the dawn upon a dream
Slowly through the fire-lit room
Crept, once more, a whispering gleam
Soft and bright as cherry bloom ;
Fluttering like a rosy fan,
Over the grey embers there
All the Flower of Old Japan
Flamed upon the fragrant air.

Only fire-light, that was all.
And that curious rhythmic throb
Singing through its rise and fall
Just the kettle on the hob.
Now our elfin sails were furled,
Now our hearts had ceased to roam,
All the wonder of the world
Blossomed round us, here at home.

While the firelight, red and clear,
Fluttered in the black wet pane,
It was very good to hear
Howling winds and trotting rain.
Dreams were dying ; but we knew
All we lacked was close at hand.
All the fairy-tales were true,
And home the heart of fairyland.

EPILOGUE.

CAROL, every violet has
Heaven for a looking-glass.

Every earthly valley lies
Under many-clouded skies.
Every lamp-lit cottage stands
Girt about with boundless lands.
Every bird upon its nest
Sleeps midway 'twixt East and West ;
And its brood, in darkness furled,
Is the centre of the world.

We have come by curious ways
To the Light that holds the days.
We have sought, in haunts of fear
For that all-enfolding sphere ;
And it was not far, but near.

We have found, to lose no more,
The shore that has no further shore.

Deep in every heart it lies,
With its own unmeasured skies ;
For what heaven can bend above
Hearts that own the heaven of love ?

Carol, Carol, we have come,
Back to heaven, back to home.

APES AND IVORY.

APES and ivory, skulls and roses, in junks of old Hong-
 Kong,
 Gliding over a sea of dreams to a haunted shore of song,
 Masts of gold and sails of satin, shimmering out of the
 East,
 Oh, Love has little need of you now to make his heart a
 feast.

Or is it an elephant, white as milk and bearing a severed
 head
 That tatters his broad soft wrinkled flank in tawdry
 patches of red,
 With an Afghan giant to walk beside and a temple dome
 above,
 Where ruby and emerald shatter the sun,—is it these
 that should please my love ?

Or is it a palace of pomegranates, where ivory-limbed
 young slaves
 Drift thro' the rainbow-tinted spray, in the whispering
 fountain's waves ;
 Or couch like cats and sun themselves on the warm white
 marble brink ?
 Oh, Love has little to ask of these, this day in May, I
 think.

Is it Lebanon cedars or purple fruits of the honeyed
southron air,
Spikenard, saffron, roses of Sharon, cinnamon, calamus,
myrrh,
A bed of spices, a fountain of waters, or the wild white
wings of a dove,
Now, when the winter is over and gone, is it these that
should please my love ?

*The sea-wind breathes thro' the saffron gorse, and the dew-
drenched may's in flower,
And the cool crisp English clouds have built my love a
lordlier tower,
Taller than Lebanon, whiter than snow, where, over her
glorying eyes,
The small dark quivering wings of the lark dissolve in the
Devon skies.*

.

SHERWOOD.

SHERWOOD in the twilight, is Robin Hood awake ?
 Grey and ghostly shadows are gliding through the brake,
 Shadows of the dappled deer, dreaming of the morn,
 Dreaming of a shadowy man that winds a shadowy horn.

Robin Hood is here again : all his merry thieves
 Hear a ghostly bugle-note shivering through the leaves,
 Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
 In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Merry, merry England has kissed the lips of June.
 All the wings of fairyland were here beneath the moon,
 Like a flight of rose-leaves fluttering in a mist
 Of opal and ruby and pearl and amethyst.

Oaken-hearted England is waking as of old,
 With eyes of blither hazel and hair of brighter gold :
 For Robin Hood is here again beneath the bursting spray
 In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Love is in the greenwood building him a house
 Of wild rose and hawthorn and honeysuckle boughs :
 Love is in the greenwood, dawn is in the skies,
 And Marian is waiting with a glory in her eyes.

Hark ! The dazzled laverock climbs the golden steep !
Marian is waiting : is Robin Hood asleep ?
Round the fairy grass-rings, frolic elf and fay,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Oberon, Oberon, rake away the gold,
Rake away the red leaves, roll away the mould,
Rake away the gold leaves, roll away the red,
And wake Will Scarlett from his leafy forest bed.

Friar Tuck and Little John are riding down together
With quarter-staff and drinking-can and grey goose
feather.
The dead are coming back again, the years are rolled
away
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

Softly over Sherwood the south wind blows.
All the heart of England hid in every rose
Hears across the greenwood the sunny whisper leap,
Sherwood in the red dawn, is Robin Hood asleep ?

Hark, the voice of England wakes him as of old
And, shattering the silence with a cry of brighter gold,
Bugles in the greenwood echo from the steep,
Sherwood in the red dawn, is Robin Hood asleep ?

Where the deer are gliding, down the shadowy glen,
All across the glades of fern he calls his merry men—
Doublets of the Lincoln green glancing through the may
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day—

Calls them and they answer : from aisles of oak and ash
Rings the *Follow ! Follow !* and the boughs begin to
crash,

The ferns begin to flutter and the flowers begin to fly,
And through the crimson dawning the robber band
goes by.

Robin ! Robin ! Robin ! All his merry thieves
Answer as the bugle-note shivers through the leaves,
Calling as he used to call, faint and far away,
In Sherwood, in Sherwood, about the break of day.

THE WORLD'S MAY.

(A PART-SONG FOR CHILDREN.)

I.

WHEN Drake went out to seek for gold
 Across the uncharted sea,
 And saw the western skies unfold
 Their veils of mystery, .
 To lure him through the fevered hours
 As nigh to death he lay,
 There floated through the foreign flowers
 A breath of English may.

And back to Devon shores again
 His dreaming spirit flew,
 Back from the splendid Spanish Main
 To haunts his childhood knew,
 Whispering " God forgive the blind
 Desire that bade me roam,
 I've sailed around the world to find
 The sweetest way to home."

II.

When Spring comes back to England,
 And crowns her brows with may,

Round the quiet moonlit world
She goes the greenwood way.
She throws a rose to Italy,
A lily of light to France ;
But round her regal morrice-ring
The seas of England glance.

When Spring comes back to England,
A huntress and a queen,
She steals ashore by Cawsand Bay,
Then dons her Lincoln green :
The primrose way beneath her feet,
The grey cloud in her sky,
While, all around her, wild and sweet,
Her speckled thrushes cry :

*Come over the water to England,
To meadow and brook and fir-wood ;
Come over the water to England,
In showers of singing rain ;
Find the glade where the arrow fell,
And, out of the bracken of Sherwood,
Robin will rise and tell you there
That earth grows young again.*

III.

And many a wanderer, far away
From England, from England,
Under the moon this night in May
To his own sleepless ghost will say,
' I know a thorn that is bright as day,
This haunted night,
In England.'

And round the elfin revels whirl
 In England, in England ;
And the buds out-break, and the leaves unfurl,
And, where the crisp white cloudlets curl,
The Dawn comes up like a primrose girl
With a crowd of flowers in a basket of pearl,
 And a rose at her breast,
 For England.

BUCCANEER DAYS.

THE rain's on the roof. The dark boughs tap at the
pane.

I have heaped up the fire ; and it shows me your face
there again,

As it shone in our cave, when we cooked our sea-perch
at a blaze

Of dry gorse and drift-wood, in boyhood's great buc-
caneer days.

The old cave by the fir-wood that slopes down the hill
to the sea,

—I remember, we smoked our first pipes there, and had
to agree

That either the clay was not ripe, or the 'baccy was
damp.

You were breaking yours in for a sailor, you said. I
gave mine to a tramp.

In a clearing above it, one fir-tree still whispers apart
With a magpie's big mud-plastered nest in its old crooked
heart.

I can still feel the smooth mottled eggs, the strange
warmth, the new wonder ;

The beauty, the pity, that spared our first exquisite
plunder.

And our "eyrie,"—that nook overhung by the cliff's
dizzy brow,
I wonder if other young pirates are haunting it now.
There were red pungent flowers on the brink. If I smell
them to-day
I am kneeling, out there, on a cliff-top, the wide world
away.

Could Araby match them? They called them "rest-harrow" at home.
They were fringes of elfin-land there, hanging over the
foam,
With magic about them, or why should that brink be
so bright
With those queer little friends of my boyhood, across the
long night?

I can see the brass ring of your spy-glass. How brightly
it shone
As you climbed through the crisp purple thyme to our
eyrie alone.
I can see the smooth sun-burn that darkened our faces
and hands
As we gazed at the merchantmen sailing away to those
palm-shadowed lands.

I can hear the long sigh of the sea as we raced in the
sun
To dry ourselves after our swim; hear the shout as we
run
Out, again, through the waves, and ride back on the
surf to the land,
To bask and grow brown on the dry drifting dunes of
the sand.

Then up, in our breeches and shirts, to that buccaneer
glow

In the cave. Is it true we grow old? Is the fire sinking
low?

Come! You shall be chief. We'll not quarrel. The
time flies so fast.

There are ships to be grappled. There's blood to be shed,
ere our summer be past,—

*It is winter, mid-winter! The dark boughs thresh at the
pane.*

*Dying embers—white ashes—the windows are beaten with
rain.*

SONG OF THE WOODEN-LEGGED FIDDLER.

(PORTSMOUTH 1805.)

I LIVED in a cottage adown in the West
 When I was a boy, a boy ;
 But I knew no peace and I took no rest
 Though the roses nigh smothered my snug little nest ;
 For the smell of the sea
 Was much rarer to me,
 And the life of a sailor was all my joy.

CHORUS.—*The life of a sailor was all my joy !*

My mother she wept, and she begged me to stay
 Anchored for life to her apron-string,
 And soon she would want me to help wi' the hay ;
 So I bided her time, then I flitted away
 On a night of delight in the following spring,
 With a pair of stout shoon
 And a seafaring tune
 And a bundle and stick in the light of the moon,
 Down the long road
 To Portsmouth I strode,
 To fight like a sailor for country and king.

CHORUS.—*To fight like a sailor for country and king.*

And now that my feet are turned homeward again
My heart is still crying Ahoy ! Ahoy !
And my thoughts are still out on the Spanish main
A-chasing the frigates of France and Spain,
For at heart an old sailor is always a boy ;
And his nose will still itch
For the powder and pitch
Till the days when he can't tell t'other from which,
Nor a grin o' the guns from a glint o' the sea,
Nor a skipper like Nelson from lubbers like me.

CHORUS.—*Nor a skipper like Nelson from lubbers
like me.*

Ay ! Now that I'm old I'm as bold as the best,
And the life of a sailor is all my joy ;
Though I've swapped my leg
For a wooden peg
And my head is as bald as a new-laid egg,
The smell of the sea
Is like victuals to me,
And I think in the grave I'll be crying Ahoy !
For, though my old carcass is ready to rest,
At heart an old sailor is always a boy.

CHORUS.—*At heart an old sailor is always a boy.*

EARTH-BOUND.

GHOSTS ? Beyond Time and Space,
 In that pure realm where Death has throned them
 now,
 Gods that were men, a crown on every brow,
 Must hunger still for earth's remembered face.

No king that steals away,
 Disguised in rags, could long as their souls long
 For rain-drenched woods, a blackbird's marriage song
 And this wild patch of sunlit ferns in May.

Ghosts ? Should we two not come,
 Aching for shelter from that blaze of light,
 Back through the terrible star-sown infinite,
 Seeking a narrower porch, a four-walled home ?

From that too high, too wide
 Communion with the heavenly powers, how fain
 To creep back, through this deep old Devon lane,
 Hedged in with blossoming thorns on either side ;

And, stifling every cry,
 To see, at dusk, our lichen-crust ed roof
 Keeping those dread eternities aloof,
 And yielding us a refuge from the sky.

We should steal in, once more,
Under the breathless lilac at the gate,
Up the walled garden ; then, with hearts elate,
Forget the stars, and close our cottage door.

Oh, then, as children use
To take a cupboard for a hiding-place,
We would rejoice in narrowness of space,
And God should give us nothing more to lose.

Or on a winter's night,
As up the lane we groped in the wet dark,
Better than all the stars were that small spark
Through bare blown boughs, our cottage window's light.

How good it all would seem
To souls that from the æonian ebb and flow
Returned to hear, once more, the to and fro
Pulse of the clock dictate its hourly theme.

How welcome the recall
From those vast symphonies of joy and pain
Beyond the grave, to these old books again,
That shaded lamp, those pictures on the wall.

Home ; home ; the old desire !
We would shut out the unfathomable skies,
Draw close the curtains ; then, with shining eyes,
Kneel by the hearth, and light the long-quenched fire.

ART, THE HERALD.

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness."

I.

BEYOND ; beyond ; and still the skies recede !
 What went ye out to seek, in dream or deed ?
 Is not the heart of all things here and now ?
 Is not the circle infinite, and the centre
 Everywhere, if ye would but hear and enter ?
 Come ; the porch bends and the great pillars bow.

II.

Come ; come and see the secret of the sun ;
 The sorrow that holds the warring worlds in one ;
 The Love whose infinite loss is infinite power ;
 One God in every seed self-sacrificed,
 One star-eyed, star-crowned universal Christ,
 Re-crucified in every wayside flower.

THE BARREL-ORGAN.

THERE's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
 In the City as the sun sinks low ;
 With a silvery cry of linnets in its dull mechanic beat,
 As it dies into the sunset-glow ;
 And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the
 pain
 That surround the singing organ like a large eternal
 light ;
 And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
 In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And now it's marching onward through the realms of
 old romance,
 And trolling out a fond familiar tune,
 And now it's roaring cannon down to fight the King of
 France,
 And now it's prattling softly to the moon,
 And all around the organ there's a sea without a shore
 Of human joys and wonders and regrets,
 To remember and to recompense the music evermore
 For what the cold machinery forgets. . . .

Yes ; as the music changes,
 Like a prismatic glass,
 It takes the light and ranges
 Through all the moods that pass ;

Dissects the common carnival
Of passions and regrets,
And gives the world a glimpse of all
The colours it forgets.

And there *La Traviata* sighs
Another sadder song ;
And there *Il Trovatore* cries
A tale of deeper wrong ;
And bolder knights to battle go
With sword and shield and lance,
Than ever here on earth below
Have whirled into—a *dance* !—

Go down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time.

Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London !)

And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's wonderland.

Go down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from London !)

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom and soft perfume and sweet perfume,

The cherry-trees are seas of bloom (and oh, so near to London !)

And there they say, when dawn is high and all the world's a blaze of sky,

The cuckoo, though he's very shy, will sing a song for London.

The Dorian nightingale is rare, and yet they say you'll hear him there

At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to London !)

The linnet and the throstle, too, and after dark the long
halloo

And golden-eyed *tu-whit, tu-whoo*, of owls that ogle
London.

For Noah hardly knew a bird of any kind that isn't
heard

At Kew, at Kew in lilac-time (and oh, so near to
London !)

And when the rose begins to pout and all the chestnut
spires are out

You'll hear the rest without a doubt, all chorussing
for London :—

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-
time ;*

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from
London !)*

*And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's
wonderland ;*

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from
London !)*

And then the troubadour begins to thrill the golden
street,

In the City as the sun sinks low ;

And in all the gaudy busses there are scores of weary
feet

Marking time, sweet time, with a dull mechanic
beat,

And a thousand hearts are plunging to a love they'll
never meet,

Through the meadows of the sunset, through the poppies
and the wheat,

In the land where the dead dreams go.

So it's Jeremiah, Jeremiah,
What have you to say
When you meet the garland girls
Tripping on their way ?

All around my gala hat
I wear a wreath of roses
(A long and lonely year it is
I've waited for the May !)
If any one should ask you,
The reason why I wear it is—
My own love, my true love, is coming to-day.

And it's buy a bunch of violets for the lady
(*It's lilac-time in London ! It's lilac-time in
London !*)

Buy a bunch of violets for the lady
While the sky burns blue above. *

On the other side the street you'll find it shady
(*It's lilac-time in London ! It's lilac-time in
London !*)

But buy a bunch of violets for the lady,
And tell her she's your own true love.

There's a barrel-organ carolling across a golden street
In the City as the sun sinks glittering and slow ;
And the music's not immortal ; but the world has made
it sweet,
And enriched it with the harmonies that make a song
complete,
In the deeper heavens of music where the night and
morning meet,
As it dies into the sunset-glow ;
And it pulses through the pleasures of the City and the
pain

That surround the singing organ like a large eternal
light,

And they've given it a glory and a part to play again
In the Symphony that rules the day and night.

And there, as the music changes,
The song runs round again.
Once more it turns and ranges
Through all its joy and pain,
Dissects the common carnival
Of passions and regrets ;
And the wheeling world remembers all
The wheeling song forgets.

Once more *La Traviata* sighs
Another sadder song.
Once more *Il Trovatore* cries
A tale of deeper wrong.
Once more the knights to battle go
With sword and shield and lance,
Till once, once more, the shattered foe
Has whirled into—a dance !

Come down to Kew in lilac-time, in lilac-time, in lilac-time.

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from
London !)*

*And you shall wander hand in hand with love in summer's
wonderland.*

*Come down to Kew in lilac-time (it isn't far from
London !)*

MUSIC AND MEMORY.

Music, that is God's memory, never forgets you.

Music, in atom, and star, and the falling leaf,
Binding all worlds in one, remembers for ever
The least light whisper and cry of our joy and grief ;

Chord calling to chord, through swift resurrectional
changes,

From key to key, in the long unbreakable chain . . .
All, all that we ever loved, though it sleep in the silence,
At a touch of the Master shall wake and be music
again.

TRIOLET.

Love, awake ! Ah, let thine eyes
Open, clouded with thy dreams.
Now the shy sweet rosy skies,
Love, awake. Ah, let thine eyes
Dawn before the last star dies.
O'er thy breast the rose-light gleams.
Love, awake ! Ah, let thine eyes
Open, clouded with thy dreams.

THE PARADOX.

"I Am that I Am."

I.

ALL that is broken shall be mended ;
 All that is lost shall be found ;
 I will bind up every wound
 When that which is begun shall be ended.
 Not peace I brought among you but a sword
 To divide the night from the day,
 When I sent My worlds forth in their battle-array
 To die and to live,
 To give and to receive,
 Saith the Lord.

II.

Of old time they said none is good save our God ;
 But ye that have seen how the ages have shrunk from
 my rod,
 And how red is the wine-press wherein at my bidding
 they trod,
 Have answered and said that with Eden I fashioned the
 snake,
 That I mould you of clay for a moment, then mar you
 and break,
 And there is none evil but I, the supreme Evil, God.

Lo, I say unto both, I am neither,
But greater than either ;
For meeting and mingling in Me they become neither
evil nor good.
Their cycle is rounded, they know neither hunger nor
food,
They need neither sickle nor seed-time, nor root nor fruit,
They are ultimate, infinite, absolute.
Therefore I say unto all that have sinned,
East and West and South and North
The wings of my measureless love go forth
To cover you all : they are free as the wings of the wind.

III.

Consider the troubled waters of the sea
Which never rest.
As the wandering waves are ye ;
Yet assuaged and appeased and forgiven,
As the seas are gathered together under the
infinite glory of heaven,
I gather you all to my breast.
But the sins and the creeds and the sorrows that trouble
the sea
Relapse and subside,
Chiming like chords in a world-wide symphony
As they cease to chide ;
For they break and they are broken of sound and hue,
And they meet and they murmur and they mingle anew,
Interweaving, intervolving, like waves. They have no
stay.
They are all made as one with the deep, when they sink
and are vanished away.
Yea, all is toned at a turn of the tide
To a calm and golden harmony ;

But I—shall I wonder or greatly care,
 For their depth or their height ?
 Shall it be more than a song in my sight
 How many wandering waves there were,
 Or how many colours and changes of light ?
 It is *your* eyes that see
 And take heed of these things : they were
 fashioned for you, not for Me.

IV.

With the stars and the clouds I have clothed Myself
 here for your eyes
 To behold That which Is. I have set forth the strength
 of the skies
 As one draweth a picture before you to make your
 hearts wise ;
 That the infinite souls I have fashioned may know as I
 know,
 Visibly revealed,
 In the flowers of the field,
 Yea, declared by the stars in their courses, the tides in
 their flow,
 And the clash of the world's wide battle as it sways to
 and fro,
 Flashing forth as a flame
 The unnameable Name,
 The ineffable Word,
 I am the Lord.

V.

I am the End to which the whole world strives.
 Therefore are ye girdled with a wild desire and shod
 With sorrow ; for among you all no soul
 Shall ever cease or sleep or reach its goal

Of union and communion with the Whole,
Or rest content with less than being God.
Still, as unending asymptotes, your lives
In all their myriad wandering ways
Approach Me with the progress of your struggling days,
Approach Me ; for my love contrives
That ye should have the glory of this
 For ever ; yea, that life should blend
 With life and only vanish away
 From day to wider wealthier day,
Like still increasing spheres of light that melt and merge
 in wider spheres
Even as the infinite years of the past melt in the infinite
 future years.
 Each new delight of sense,
 Each hope, each love, each fear,
 Widens, relumes and recreates each sphere,
From a new ring and nimbus of pre-eminence.
I am the Sphere without circumference :
I only and for ever comprehend
All others that within Me meet and blend.
 Death is the blinding kiss
 Of two finite infinities ;
 Two finite infinite orbs
The splendour of the greater of which absorbs
The less, though both like Love have no beginning and
no end.

VI.

Therefore is Love's own breath
Like Knowledge, a continual death ;
And all his laughter and kisses and tears,
 And woven wiles of peace and strife,
That ever widen thus your temporal spheres,
Are making of the memory of your former years
 A very death in life.

VII.

I am that I am.
Ye are evil and good.
With colour and glory and story and song ye are fed as
with food.
The cold and the heat,
The bitter and the sweet,
The calm and the tempest fulfil My Word ;
Yet will ye complain of My two-edged sword
That has fashioned the finite and mortal and given you
the sweetness of strife,
The blackness and whiteness,
The darkness and brightness,
Which sever your souls from the formless and void and
hold you fast-fettered to life ?

VIII.

Behold now, is life not good ?
Yea, is it not also much more than the food,
More than the raiment, more than the breath ?
Yet strife is its name !
Say, which will ye cast out first from the furnace, the
fuel or the flame ?
Would ye all be as I am ; and know neither evil nor
good ; neither life ; neither death ;
Or mix with the void and the formless till all were as one
and the same ?

IX.

I am that I am ; the Container of all things : kneel, lift
up your hands
To the high Consummation of good and of evil which
none understands ;
The divine Paradox, the ineffable Word, in whose light
the poor souls that ye trod

Underfoot as too vile for their fellows are at terrible
union with God !

Am I not over both evil and good,
The righteous man and the shedder of blood ?

Shall I save or slay ?

I am neither the night nor the day,
Saith the Lord.

Judge not, O ye that are round my footstool, judge
not, ere the hour be born

That shall laugh you also to scorn.

X.

Ah, yet I say unto all that have sinned,

East and West and South and North

The wings of my measureless love go forth

To cover you all : they are free as the wings of the wind.

XI.

But one thing is needful ; and ye shall be true

To yourselves and the goal and the God that ye seek ;

Yea, the day and the night shall requite it to you

If ye love one another, if your love be not weak.

XII.

Since I sent out my worlds in their battle-array

To die and to live,

To give and to receive,

Not peace, not peace, I have brought among you but a sword,

To divide the night from the day,

Saith the Lord ;

Yet all that is broken shall be mended,

And all that is lost shall be found,

I will bind up every wound,

When that which is begun shall be ended.

THE FOREST OF WILD THYME.

DEDICATED TO
HELEN, ROSAMUND, AND BEATRIX.

PERSONS OF THE TALE.

OURSELVES.	THE HIDEOUS HERMIT.
FATHER.	THE KING OF FAIRY-LAND.
MOTHER.	PEASE-BLOSSOM.
LITTLE BOY BLUE.	MUSTARD-SEED.

Dragons, Fairies, Mammoths, Angels, &c.

APOLOGIA.

ONE more hour to wander free
As Puck on his unbridled bee
Thro' heather-forests, leagues of bloom,
Our childhood's maze of scent and sun !
Forbear awhile your notes of doom,
Dear critics, give me still this one
Swift hour to hunt the fairy gleam
That flutters thro' the unfettered dream.

It mocks me as it flies, I know.
All too soon the gleam will go ;
Yet I love it and shall love
My dream that brooks no narrower bars
Than bind the darkening heavens above,
My Jack-o'-lanthorn of the stars.
Then I'll follow it no more,
I'll light the lamp. I'll close the door.

PRELUDE.

HUSH ! if you remember how we sailed to Old Japan,
Peterkin was with us then, our little brother Peterkin !
Now we've lost him, so they say. I think the tall thin
man
Must have come and touched him with his curious
twinkling fan
And taken him away again, our merry little Peterkin.
He'll be frightened all alone ; we'll find him if we can.
Come and look for Peterkin, poor little Peterkin.

No one would believe us if we told them what we know,
Or they wouldn't grieve for Peterkin, merry little
Peterkin.
If they'd only watched us roaming through the streets of
Miyako,
And travelling in a palanquin where parents never go,
And seen the golden gardens where we wandered once
with Peterkin,
And smelt the purple orchards where the cherry-blossoms
blow,
They wouldn't mourn for Peterkin, merry little Peterkin.

Put away your muskets, lay aside the drum,
Hang it by the wooden sword we made for little Peter-
kin !
He was once our trumpeter. Now his bugle's dumb.
Pile your arms beneath it, for the owlet light is come.

We'll wander through the roses where we marched of
old with Peterkin.
We'll search the summer sunset where the Hybla bee-
hives hum,
And—if we meet a fairy there—we'll ask for news of
Peterkin.

He was once our cabin-boy and cooked the prawns for tea;
And oh, we've sailed around the world with laughing
little Peterkin.
From nursery floor to pantry door we've roamed the
mighty sea,
And come to port below the stairs in distant Caribee,
But wheresoe'er we sailed we took our little lubber
Peterkin,
Because his wide gray eyes believed much more than
ours could see,
And so we liked our Peterkin, our trusty little Peterkin.

Peterkin, Peterkin, I think if you came back
The captain of our host to-day should be the bugler
Peterkin,
And he should lead our smugglers up that steep and
narrow track,
A band of noble brigands, bearing each a mighty pack
Crammed with lace and jewels to the secret cave of
Peterkin,
And he should wear the biggest boots and make his
pistol crack,—
The Spanish cloak, the velvet mask, we'd give them
all to Peterkin.

Come, my brother pirates. I am tired of play.
Come and look for Peterkin, little brother Peterkin,
Our gallant little comrade that the fairies took away,

For people think we've lost him, and when we come to say
Our good-night prayers to mother, if we pray for little
Peterkin

Her eyes are very sorrowful, she turns her head away.
Come and look for Peterkin, merry little Peterkin.

God bless little Peterkin, wherever he may be !

Come and look for Peterkin, lonely little Peterkin.

I wonder if they've taken him again across the sea
From the town of Wonder-Wander and the Amfalula tree,
To the land of many marvels where we roamed of old
with Peterkin,

The land of blue pagodas and the flowery fields of tea !
Come and look for Peterkin, poor little Peterkin.

PART I.—THE SPLENDID SECRET.

Now father stood engaged in talk
With mother on that narrow walk
Between the laurels (where we play
At Red-skins lurking for their prey)
And the gray old wall of roses
Where the Persian kitten dozes
And the sunlight sleeps upon
Crannies of the crumbling stone.
—So hot it is you scarce can bear
Your naked hand upon it there,
Though there luxuriating in heat
With a slow and gorgeous beat
White-winged currant-moths display
Their spots of black and gold all day.—

Well, since we greatly wished to know
Whether we too might some day go
Where little Peterkin had gone
Without one word and all alone,
We crept up through the laurels there
Hoping that we might overhear
The splendid secret, darkly great,
Of Peterkin's mysterious fate ;
And on what high adventure bound
He left our pleasant garden-ground,
Whether for Old Japan once more
He voyaged from the dim blue shore,
Or whether he set out to run
By candle-light to Babylon.

We just missed something father said
About a young prince that was dead,
A little warrior that had fought
And failed : how hopes were brought to nought
He said, and mortals made to bow

Before the Juggernaut of Death,
And all the world was darker now,

For Time's grey lips and icy breath
Had blown out all the enchanted lights
That burned in Love's Arabian nights ;
And now he could not understand
Mother's mystic fairy-land,

' Land of the dead, poor fairy-tale,'
He murmured, and her face grew pale,
And then with great soft shining eyes
She leant to him—she looked so wise—
And, with her cheek against his cheek,
We heard her, ah so softly, speak.

' Once—once—there was a happier day,
When with clear eyes you used to say
The secret of the whole dark world
Within the Smallest Flower was furled,
As in a Temple, deep and sweet,
Where all the hosts of heaven could meet.
Is heaven a fairy-tale ? ' she said.

He looked at her, and bent his head.
Yet *we* could never understand
Why heaven should *not* be fairy-land,
A part of heaven at least, and why
The thought of it made mother cry,
And why they went away so sad,

And father still quite unforgiven,
For what could children be but glad
To find a fairy-land in heaven ?

And as we talked it o'er we found
Our brains were really spinning round ;
But Dick, our eldest, late returned
From school, by all the lore he'd learned
Declared that we should seek the lost
Smallest Flower at any cost.
For, since within its leaves lay furled
The secret of the whole wide world,
He thought that we might learn therein
The whereabouts of Peterkin ;
And, if we found the Flower, we knew
Father would be forgiven, too ;
And mother's kiss atone for all
The sadness by the rose-hung wall ;
We knew not how, we knew not why,
But Dick it was who bade us try.
Dick made it all seem plain and clear,
And Dick it is who helps us here
To tell this tale of fairy-land
In words we scarce can understand.
For ere another golden hour
Had passed, our anxious parents found
We'd left the scented garden-ground
To seek—the Smallest Flower.

PART II.—THE FIRST DISCOVERY.

OH, grown-ups cannot understand
And grown-ups never will,
How short's the way to fairy-land
Across the purple hill.
They smile. Their smile is very bland,
Their eyes are wise and chill ;
And yet—at just a child's command—
The world's an Eden still.

Under the cloudy lilac-tree,
Out at the garden-gate,
We stole, a little band of three,
To tempt our fairy fate.
There was no human eye to see,
No voice to bid us wait ;
The gardener had gone home to tea,
The hour was very late.

I wonder if you've ever dreamed,
In summer's noonday sleep,
Of what the thyme and heather seemed
To ladybirds that creep
Like small black-spotted crimson gems
Between the tiny twisted stems
Of fairy forests deep ;
Or what it looks like as they pass
Through jungles of the golden grass.

If you could suddenly become
As small a thing as they,
A midget-child, a new Tom Thumb,
A little gauze-winged fay,
Oh then, as through the mighty shades
Of wild thyme woods and violet glades
You groped your forest-way,
How fraught each fragrant bough would be
With dark o'erhanging mystery.

How high the forest aisles would loom,
What wondrous wings would beat
Through gloamings loaded with perfume
In many a rich retreat,
While trees like purple censers bowed
And swung beneath a swooning cloud
Mysteriously sweet,
Where flowers that haunt no mortal clime
Bewitch the Forest of Wild Thyme.

We'd watched the bats and beetles flit
Through sunset-coloured air
The night that we discovered it
And all the heavens were bare :
We'd seen the colours melt and pass
Like silent ghosts across the grass
To sleep—our hearts knew where ;
And so we rose, and hand in hand
We sought the gates of fairy-land.

For Peterkin, O Peterkin,
The cry was in our ears,
An elfin clamour, clear and thin
From lands beyond the years ;

A wistful note, a dying fall
As of the bird-like bugle-call
 A haunted changeling hears,
And pines within his mortal home
Once more across the fern to roam.

We left behind the pleasant row
 Of cottage window-panes,
The village inn's red-curtained glow,
 The lovers in the lanes ;
And stout of heart and strong of will
We climbed the purple perfumed hill,
 And hummed the sweet refrains
Of fairy tunes the tall thin man
Taught us of old in Old Japan.

Then, by the churchyard path we found
 That foolish stone which said
Our Peterkin was sleeping sound
 As in his own small bed ;
And yet—it could not tell us where
To find him now, in earth or air,
 Or blue sky overhead . . .
It was a splendid place for play,
That churchyard, on a summer's day ;

A splendid place for hide-and-peek
 Between the gray old stones ;
Where even grown-ups used to speak
 In awestruck whispering tones ;
And here and there the grass ran wild
In jungles for the creeping child,
 And there were elfin zones
Of twisted flowers and words in rhyme
And great sweet cushions of wild thyme.

So in a wild thyme snuggery there
We stayed awhile to rest.
A bell was calling folk to prayer.
One star was in the West.
The cottage lights grew far away.
The whole sky seemed to waver and sway
Above our fragrant nest ;
And from a distant dreamland moon
Once more we heard that fairy tune.

Why, mother once had sung it us
When, ere we went to bed,
She told the tale of Pyramus,
How Thisbe found him dead
And mourned his eyes as green as leeks,
His cherry nose, his cowslip cheeks.

That tune would oft around us float
Since on a golden noon
We saw the play that Shakespeare wrote
Of Lion, Wall, and Moon ;
Ah, hark—the ancient fairy theme—
Following darkness like a dream !

The very song Will Shakespeare sang,
The music that through Sherwood rang
And Arden and that forest glade
Where Hermie and Lysander strayed,
And Puck cried out with impish glee,
Lord, what fools these mortals be !

Though the masquerade was mute
Of Quince and Snout and Snug and Flute,
And Bottom with his donkey's head
Decked with roses, white and red,

Though the elf-kind had forsaken
Sherwood now and faintly shaken
The forest-scents from off their feet,
Yet from some divine retreat
Came the music, sweet and clear,
To chime upon the raptured ear
With the free unfettered sway
Of hare-bells in the moon of May :
Moved by an elfin air that knows
A bank whereon the wild thyme blows.

Out of the undiscovered land
So sweetly rang the song,
We dreamed we wandered, hand in hand,
The fragrant aisles along,
Where long ago had gone to dwell
In some enchanted distant dell
The outlawed fairy throng
When out of Sherwood's wildest glen
They sank, forsaking mortal men.

And as we dreamed, the shadowy ground
Seemed gradually to swell ;
And a strange forest rose around,
But how—we could not tell.
Purple against a rose-red sky
The big boughs brooded silently.
Far off we heard a bell ;
And, suddenly, a great red light
Smouldered before our startled sight.

Then came a cry, a fiercer flash,
And down between the trees
We saw great crimson figures crash,
Wild-eyed monstrosities ;

Great dragon shapes that breathed a flame
From roaring nostrils as they came.

We sank upon our knees.
Like armoured fire-men, ten feet high,
With buckets of dew they bumbled by.

And then, as down that mighty dell
We followed, faint with fear,
We understood the tolling bell
That called the monsters there ;
For right in front we saw a house
Woven of wild mysterious boughs
Bursting out everywhere
In crimson flames, and with a shout
The monsters rushed to put it out.

And, in a flash, the truth was ours.
We knew, at once,—we knew—
The meaning of those trees like flowers,
Those boughs of rose and blue,
And from the world we'd left above
A voice came crooning like a dove
To prove the dream was true :
And this—we knew it by the rhyme—
Must be—the Forest of Wild Thyme,

For out of the mystical rose-red dome
Of heaven the voice came murmuring down :
*O Ladybird, Ladybird, fly away home ;
Your house is on fire and your children are gone.*

We knew, we knew it by the rhyme,
Though *we* seemed, after all,
No tinier, yet the stalks of thyme
Towered like a forest tall

All round us ; oh, we knew not how,
And yet—we knew those monsters now :
Our dream's divine recall
Had dwarfed us, as with magic words ;
The dragons were but ladybirds !

And all around us as we gazed,
Half glad, half frightened, all amazed,
The scented clouds of purple smoke
In lurid gleams of crimson broke ;
And o'er our heads the huge black trees
Obscured the sky's red mysteries ;
While here and there gigantic wings
Beat o'er us, and great scaly things
Fold over monstrous leathern fold
Out of the smouldering copses rolled ;
And eyes like blood-red pits of flame
From many a forest-cavern came
To glare across the blazing glade,
Till, with the sudden thought dismayed,
We wondered if we e'er should find
The mortal home we'd left behind.
Fear clutched us in a grisly grasp.
We gave one wild and white-lipped gasp,
Then turned and ran, with streaming hair,
Away, away, and anywhere !

And hurry-skurry, heart and heel and hand, we tore
along,

And still our flying feet kept time and tune for little
Peterkin.

For Peterkin, O Peterkin, it made a kind of song
To prove the road was right although it seemed so dark
and wrong,

As through the desperate woods we plunged and
ploughed for little Peterkin,

Where many a hidden jungle-beast made noises like a
gong
That rolled and roared and rumbled as we rushed
along to Peterkin.

Peterkin, Peterkin, if you could only hear
And answer us ; one little word from little lonely
Peterkin
To take and comfort father. He is sitting in his chair
In the library : he's listening for your footstep on the
stair
And your patter down the passage. He can only
think of Peterkin.
Come back, come back to father, for to-day he'd let us
tear
His newest book to make a paper-boat for little
Peterkin.

PART III.—THE HIDEOUS HERMIT.

AH, what wonders round us rose
When we dared to pause and look,
Curious things that seemed all toes,
Goblins from a picture-book ;
Ants like witches, four feet high,
Waving all their skinny arms,
Glared at us and wandered by,
Muttering their ancestral charms.

Stately forms in green and gold
Armour strutted through the glades,
Just as Hamlet's ghost, we're told,
Mooned among the midnight shades :
Once a sort of devil came
Scattering broken trees about,
Winged with leather, eyed with flame,—
He was but a moth, no doubt.

Here and there, above us clomb
Feathery clumps of palm on high :
Those were ferns, of course, but some
Towered as though to touch the sky.
Once, across a fragrant glade,
Listening as we onward stole,
Half delighted, half afraid,
Dong, we heard the hare-bells toll !

Something told us what that gleam
Down the glen was brooding o'er ;
Something told us in a dream
What the bells were tolling for !
Something told us there was fear,
Horror, peril, on our way !
Was it far or was it near ?
Near, we heard the night-wind say.

Near ; and once or twice we saw
Something like a monstrous eye,
Something like a hideous claw
Steal between us and the sky.
Still we hummed a dauntless tune,
Trying to think such things might be
Glimpses of the fairy moon
Hiding in some hairy tree.

Yet around us as we went
Through the glades of rose and blue
Sweetness with the horror blent
Wonder-wild in scent and hue.
Here Aladdin's cavern yawned,
Jewelled thick with gorgeous dyes.
There a head of clover dawned
Like a cloud in eastern skies.

Hills of topaz, lakes of dew,
Fairy cliffs of crystal sheen
Passed we ; and the forest's blue
Sea of branches tossed between.
Once we saw a gryphon make
One soft iris as it passed
Like the curving meteor's wake
O'er the forest, far and fast.

Winged with purple, breathing flame,
Crimson-eyed we saw him go,
Where—ah ! could it be the same
Dragon-fly we used to know ?—
Valley-lilies overhead,
High aloof in clustered spray,
Far through heaven their splendour spread,
Glimmering like the Milky Way.

Mammoths father calls “ extinct,”
Creatures that the cave-men feared,
Through that forest walked and blinked,
Through that jungle crawled and leered.
Beasts no Nimrod ever knew,
Woolly bears in black and red,
Crocodiles—we wondered who
Ever dared to see *them* fed.

Were they lizards ? If they were,
They could swallow *us* with ease ;
But they slumbered quietly there
In among the mighty trees.
Red and silver, blue and green,
Played the moonlight on their scales.
Golden eyes they had, and lean
Crookéd legs with cruel nails.

Yet again, oh, faint and far,
Came the shadow of a cry,
Like the calling of a star
To its brother in the sky ;
Like an echo in a cave
Where young mermen sound their shells.
Like the wind across a grave
Bright with scent of lily-bells.

Like an elfin hunter's horn
 Pealing up a rocky glen
 Welcome to a rosier morn
 And the fairy quest again :
 Then, all round it surged a song
 We could never understand,
 Though it lingered with us long,
 And it seemed so sad and grand.

SONG.

*Little Boy Blue, you are gallant and brave.
 There was never a doubt in those clear bright eyes.
 Come, challenge the grim dark Gates of the Grave
 As the skylark sings to those infinite skies !
 This world is a dream, say the old and the wise,
 And its rainbows arise o'er the false and the true ;
 But the mists of the morning are made of our sighs.
 Ah, shatter them, scatter them, Little Boy Blue !*

*Little Boy Blue, if the child-heart knows,
 Sound but a note as a little one may ;
 And the thorns of the desert shall bloom with the rose,
 And the Healer shall wipe all tears away.
 Little Boy Blue, we are all astray,
 The sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn.
 Ah, set the world right, as a little one may.
 Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn !*

There, between the shadowy trees
 Circled with a misty gleam
 Like the light a mourner sees
 Round an angel in a dream ;

Was it he ? O, brave and slim,
Straight and clad in airy blue,
Lifting to his lips the dim
Golden horn ? We never knew !

Never ; for a witch's hair
Flooded all the moonlit sky,
And he vanished, then and there,
In the twinkling of an eye.
Just as either boyish cheek
Puffed to set the world aright,
Ere the golden horn could speak
Round him flowed the purple night.

Toll ; and through the woods once more
Stole we, drenched with fragrant dew.
Toll ; the hare-bell's burden bore
Deeper meanings than we knew.
Still it told us there was fear,
Horror, peril on our way !
Was it far or was it near ?
Near, we heard the night-wind say !

.

At last we came to a round black road
That tunnelled through the woods and showed,
Or so we thought, a good clear way
Back to the upper lands of day.
Great silken cables overhead
In many a mighty mesh were spread
Netting the rounded arch, no doubt
To keep the weight of leafage out.
And, as the tunnel narrowed down,
So thick and close the cords had grown
No leaf could through their meshes stray,
And the faint moonlight died away.

Only a strange grey glimmer shone
To guide our weary footsteps on,
Until, tired out, we stood before
The end, a great grey silken door.

Then from out a weird old wicket, overgrown with
shaggy hair

Like a weird and wicked eyebrow round a weird and
wicked eye,

Two great eyeballs and a beard

For one ghastly moment peered

At our faces with a sudden stealthy stare :

Then the door was opened wide,

And a hideous hermit cried

With a shy and soothing smile from out his lair,

*Won't you walk into my complex ? I can make you cosy
there !*

And we couldn't quite remember where we'd heard that
phrase before,

As the great grey-bearded ogre stood beside his open door ;

But an echo seemed to answer from a land beyond the
sky—

Won't you walk into my parlour ? said the spider to the fly !

Then we looked a little closer at the ogre as he stood

With his great red eyeballs glowing like two torches in a
wood,

And his mighty speckled belly and his dreadful clutching
claws,

And his nose—a horny parrot's beak, his whiskers and
his jaws ;

Yet his voice was sympathetic, and we saw two tears
descend,

As he murmured “ I'm so ugly, but I've lost my dearest
friend !

I tell you most lymphatic'ly, I've yearnings in my soul,"—

And right along his parrot's beak we saw the teardrops roll.

*He's an arrant sentimentalist, we heard a distant sigh,
Won't you weep upon my bosom ? said the spider to the fly.*

" If you'd dreamed my dreams of beauty, if you'd seen my works of art,

If you'd felt the cruel hunger that is gnawing at my heart,
And the grief that never leaves me and the love I can't forget,

(For I loved with all the letters in the Chinese alphabet !)
Oh, you'd all come in to comfort me. You ought to help the weak ;

And I'm full of melting moments ; and—I—know—the—thing—you—seek ! "

And the haunting echo answered, "*Well, I'm sure you ought to try ;*

There's a duty to one's neighbour," said the spider to the fly.

So we walked into his parlour
Though a gleam was in his eye ;
And it *was* the prettiest parlour
That ever we did spy !

But we saw by the uncertain
Misty light, shot through with gleams
Of many a silken curtain
Brodered o'er with dreadful dreams,
That he locked the door behind us ! So we stood with
bated breath
In a silence deep as death.

There were scarlet gleams and crimson
 In the curious foggy gray,
 Like the blood-red light that swims on
 Old canals at fall of day,
 Where the smoke of some great city loops and droops in
 gorgeous veils
 Round the heavy purple barges' tawny sails.

Were those creatures gagged and muffled
 See—there—by that severed head ?
 Was it but a breeze that ruffled
 Those dark curtains, splashed with red,
 Ruffled the dark figures on them, made them moan like
 things in pain ?
 How we wished that we were safe at home again.

.
 " Oh, we want to hear of Peterkin. Good sir, you say
 you know ;
 Won't you tell us, won't you put us in the way we want
 to go ? "

So we pleaded, for he seemed so very full of sighs and tears
 That we couldn't doubt his kindness, and we smothered
 all our fears.

But he said, " You must be crazy if you come to me for
 help.

Why should I desire to send you to your horrid little
 whelp ? "

And again the foolish echo made a far away reply,

" Oh, don't come to me for comfort,

Pray don't look to me for comfort,

*Heavens ! you mustn't be so selfish," said the spider
 to the fly.*

" Still, when the King of Scotland, so to speak, was in a
 hole,

He was aided by my brother. It's a story to console

The convict on the treadmill and the infant with a sum,
For it teaches you to try again until your kingdom's
come !

The monarch dawdled in that hole for centuries of time
Until my own twin-brother rose and showed him how to
climb.

He showed him how to swing and sway upon a tiny thread
Across a mighty precipice, and light upon his head
Without a single fracture and without a single pain
If he only did it frequently and tried and tried again."
And once again the whisper like a moral wandered by,
"Perseverance is a virtue," said the spider to the fly.

Then he moaned, " My heart is hungry ; but I fear I
cannot eat.

(Of course I speak entirely now of spiritual meat !)
For I only fed an hour ago, but if we calmly sat
While I told you all my troubles in a confidential chat
It would give me *such* an appetite to hear you sympathise,
And I should sleep the better—see, the tears are in my
eyes !

Dead yearnings are such dreadful things, let's keep 'em
all alive,—

Let's sit and talk awhile, my dears. We'll dine, I think,
at five."

And he brought his chair beside us in his most engaging
style,

And began to tell his story with a melancholy smile.—

" You remember Miss Muffet
Who sat on a tuffet
Partaking of curds and whey ;
Well, *I* am the spider
Who sat down beside her
And frightened Miss Muffet away !

There was nothing against her !
 An elderly spinster
 Were such a grammatical mate
 For a spider and spinner,
 I swore I would win her,
 I knew I had met with my fate !

That love was the purest
 And strongest and surest
 I'd felt since my first thread was spun.
 I know I'm a bogey,
 But *she's* an old fogey,
 So why in the world did she run ?

When Bruce was in trouble,
 A spider, my double,
 Encouraged him greatly, they say !
 Now, *why* should the spider .
 Who sat down beside her
 Have frightened Miss Muffet away ? "

He seemed to have much more to tell,
 But we could scarce be listening well,
 Although we tried with all our might
 To look attentive and polite ;
 For still afar we heard the thin
 Elfin call to Peterkin.
 Clear as a skylark's mounting song
 It drew our wandering thoughts along.
 Afar, it seemed, yet, ah, so nigh.
 Deep in our dreams it scaled the sky.
 In captive dreams that brooked no bars
 It touched the love that moves the stars,
 And with sweet music's golden tether
 It bound our hearts and heaven together.

SONG.

*Wake, arise, the lake, the skies
 Fade into the faëry day ;
 Come and sing before our king,
 Heed not Time, the dotard gray.
 Time has given his crown to heaven.
 Ah, how long ? Awake, away !*

Then, as the Hermit rambled on
 In one long listless monotone,
 We heard a wild and mournful groan
 Come rumbling down the tunnelled way ;
 A voice, an awful mournful bray,
 Singing some old funereal lay.
 Then solemn footsteps, muffled, dull,
 Approached as if they trod on wool,
 And as they nearer, nearer drew,
 We saw our Host was listening too !

His bulging eyes began to glow
 Like great red match-heads rubbed at night,
 And then he stole with a grim " O-ho ! "
 To that gray old wicket where, out of sight,
 Blandly rubbing his hands and humming,
 He could see, at one glance, whatever was coming.

He had never been so jubilant or frolicsome before,
 As he scurried on his cruel hairy crutches to the door ;
 And flung it open wide
 And most hospitably cried,
 " Won't you walk into my parlour ? I've some little
 friends to tea,—
 They'll be highly entertaining to a man of sympathy,
 Such as you yourself must be ! "

Then the man, for so he seemed,
 (Doubtless one who'd lost his way
 And was dwarfed as we had been !)
 In his ancient suit of black,
 Black upon the verge of green,
 Entered like a ghost that dreamed
 Sadly of some bygone day ;
 And he never ceased to sing
 In that awful mournful bray.

The door closed behind his back.
 He walked round us in a ring,
 And we hoped that he might free us,
 But his tears appeared to blind him,
 For he didn't seem to see us,
 And the Hermit crept behind him
 Like a cat about to spring.
 And the song he sang was this ;
 And his nose looked very grand
 As he sang it, with a bliss
 Which we could not understand ;
 For his voice was very sad,
 While his nose was proud and glad.

*Rain, April, rain, thy sunny, sunny tears !
 Through the black boughs the robe of Spring appears,
 Yet, for the ghosts of all the bygone years,
 Rain, April, rain.*

*Rain, April, rain. The rose will soon be glad.
 Spring will rejoice, a Spring I, too, have had.
 A little while, till I no more be sad,
 Rain, April, rain.*

And then the spider sprang
Before we could breathe or speak,
And one great scream out-rang
As the terrible horny beak
Crunched into the Sad Man's head,
And the terrible hairy claws
Clutched him around his middle ;
And he opened his lantern-jaws,
And he gave one twist, one twiddle,
One kick, and his sorrow was dead.

And there, as he sucked his bleeding prey,
The spider leered at us—" You will do,
My sweet little dears, for another day ;
But this is the sort I like ; huh ! huh ! "

And there we stood, in frozen fear,
Whiter than death,
With bated breath ;
And lo ! as we thought of Peterkin,
Father and home and Peterkin,
Once more that music clear and thin,
Clear as a skylark's mounting song,
But nearer now, more sweet, more strong,
Drew all our wandering thoughts along,
Until it seemed, a mystic sea
Of hidden delight and harmony
Began to ripple and rise all round
The prison where our hearts lay bound ;
And from sweet heaven's most rosy rim
There swelled a distant marching hymn
Which made the hideous Hermit pause
And listen with lank down-dropt jaws,
Till, with great bulging eyes of fear,
He sought the wicket again to peer

Along the tunnel, as like sweet rain
We heard the still approaching strain,
And, under it, the rhythmic beat
Of multitudinous marching feet. . . .
Nearer, nearer, they rippled and rang,
And this was the marching song they sang :—

SONG.

*A fairy band are we
In fairy-land.
Singing march we, hand in hand ;
Singing, singing all day long.
(Some folk never heard a fairy-song !)*

*Singing, singing,
When the freckled thrush is swinging
On a springing spray ;
Or when the witch that lives in gloomy caves
And creeps by night among the graves
Calls a cloud across the day.
Cease we never our fairy song,
March we ever, along, along,
Down the dale, or up the hill,
Singing, singing still.*

And suddenly the Hermit turned and ran with all his might

Through the back-door of his parlour as we thought of little Peterkin ;

And the great grey roof was shattered by a shower of rosy light,

And the spider-house went floating, torn and tattered through the night

In a flight of shining streamers, as a shout went up for
Peterkin ;
And lo, the glistening fairy-host stood there arrayed for
fight,
In arms of rose and green and gold, to lead us on to
Peterkin.

And all around us, rippling like a pearl and opal sea,
The host of fairy faces winked a kindly hint of Peterkin ;
And all around the rosy glade a laugh of fairy glee
Watched spider-streamers floating up from fragrant tree
to tree
Till the moonlight caught the gossamers and, oh, we
wished for Peterkin !
Each rope became a rainbow ; but it made us ache to see
Such a fairy forest-pomp without explaining it to
Peterkin.

Then all the glittering crowd
With a courtly gesture bowed
Like a rosy jewelled cloud
Round a flame,
As the King of Fairy-land,
Very dignified and grand,
Stepped forward to demand
Whence we came.

He'd a cloak of gold and green
Such as caterpillars spin,
For the fairy ways, I ween,
Are very frugal.
He'd a bow that he had borne
Since the crimson Eden morn,
And a honeysuckle horn
For his bugle.

So we told our tale of faëry to the King of Fairy-land,
And asked if he could let us know the latest news of
Peterkin ;

And he turned him with a courtly smile and waved his
jewelled wand

And cried, *Pease-blossom, Mustard-seed ! You know the
old command.*

*Well ; these are little children. You must lead them on
to Peterkin.*

Then he knelt. The King of Faëry knelt ; his eyes were
great and grand

As he took our hands and kissed them, saying,
Father loves your Peterkin !

So out they sprang, on either side,
A light fantastic fairy guide,
To lead us to the land unknown
Where little Peterkin was gone ;
And, as we went with timid pace,
We saw that every fairy face
In all that moonlit host was wet
With tears. We never shall forget
The mystic hush that seemed to fade
Away like sound, as down the glade
We passed beyond their zone of light.
Then through the forest's purple night
We trotted, at a pleasant speed,
With gay Pease-blossom and Mustard-seed.

PART IV.—PEASE-BLOSSOM AND
MUSTARD-SEED.

SHYLY we surveyed our guides,
As through the gloomy woods we went,
In the light that the straggling moonbeams lent.

We envied them their easy strides !
Pease-blossom, with his crimson cap
And delicate suit of rose-leaf green,
His crimson sash and his jewelled dagger,
Strutted along with an elegant swagger
Which showed that he didn't care one rap
For anything less than a Fairy Queen.

His eyes were deep like the eyes of a poet,
Although his crisp and curly hair
Certainly didn't seem to show it !

While Mustard-seed was a devil-may-care
Epigrammatic and pungent fellow
Clad in a splendid suit of yellow,
With emerald stars on his glittering breast
And eyes that shone with a diamond light.

They made you feel sure it would always be best
To tell him the truth ; he was not perhaps *quite*
So polite as Pease-blossom, but then who could be
Quite such a debonair fairy as he ?

We never could tell you one half that we heard
And saw on that journey. For instance, a bird

Ten times as big as an elephant stood
By the side of a nest like a great thick wood.
The clouds in glimmering wreaths were spread
Behind its vast and shadowy head
Which rolled at us trembling below. (Its eyes
Were like great black moons in those pearl-pale skies.)
And we feared he might take us, perhaps, for a worm.

But he ruffled his breast with the sound of a storm,
And snuggled his head with a careless disdain
Under his huge hunched wing again ;
And Mustard-seed said, as we stole thro' the dark,
There was nothing to fear : it was only a Lark !

And so he cheered the way along
With many a neat little epigram,
While dear Pease-blossom before him swam
On a billow of lovely moonlit song,
Telling us why they had left their home
In Sherwood, and had hither come
To dwell in this magical scented clime,
This dim old Forest of sweet Wild Thyme.

“ Men toil,” he said, “ from morn till night
With bleeding hands and blinded sight
For gold, more gold ! They have betrayed
The trust that in their souls was laid.
Their fairy birthright they have sold
For little disks of mortal gold ;
And now they cannot even see
The gold upon the greenwood tree,
The wealth of coloured lights that pass
In soft gradations through the grass,
The riches of the love untold
That wakes the day from gray to gold ;

And howsoe'er the moonlight weaves
Magic webs among the leaves,
Englishmen care little now
For elves beneath the hawthorn bough.
Nor if Robin should return
Dare they of an outlaw learn ;
For them the Smallest Flower is furred.
Mute is the music of the world,
And unbelief has driven away
Beauty from the blossomed spray."

Then Mustard-seed with diamond eyes
Taught us to be laughter-wise,
And he showed us how that Time
Was much less powerful than a rhyme ;
And that Space was but a dream ;
" For look," he said, with eyes agleam,
" Now you are become so small
You think the Thyme a forest tall ;
But underneath your feet you see
A world of wilder mystery
Where, if you were smaller yet,
You would just as soon forget
This forest, which you'd leave above
As you have left the home you love !
For, since the Thyme you used to know
Seems a forest here below,
What if you should sink again
And find there stretched a mighty plain
Between each grass-blade and the next ?
You'd think till you were quite perplexed !
Especially if all the flowers
That lit the sweet Thyme-forest bowers
Were in that wild transcendent change
Turned to Temples, great and strange,

With many a pillared portal high
And domes that swelled against the sky !
How foolish, then, you will agree,
Are those who think that all must see
The world alike, or those who scorn
Another who, perchance, was born
Where—in a different dream from theirs—
What they call sins to him are prayers !
We cannot judge. We cannot know.
All things mingle. All things flow.
There's only one thing constant here—
Love—that untranscended sphere :
Love, that while all ages run
Holds the wheeling worlds in one ;
Love, that, as your sages tell,
Soars to heaven and sinks to hell."

Even as he spoke, we seemed to grow
Smaller, the Thyme trees seemed to go
Farther away from us : new dreams
Flashed out on us with mystic gleams
Of mighty Temple-domes. Deep awe
Held us all breathless as we saw
A carven portal glimmering out
Between new flowers that put to rout
Our other fancies. In sweet fear
We tiptoed past, and seemed to hear
A sound of singing from within
That told our souls of Peterkin.
Our thoughts of *him* were still the same
Howe'er the shadows went and came !
So, on we wandered, hand in hand,
And all the world was elfin-land.

.

Then we came through a glittering crystal grot
By a path like a pale moonbeam,
And a broad blue bridge of Forget-me-not
Over a strange dark stream,
To where, through the deep blue dusk, a gleam
Rose like the soul of the setting sun ;
A sunset breaking through the earth,
A crimson sea of the poppies of dream
Deep as the sleep that gave them birth
In the night where all earthly dreams are done.

And then, like a pearl-pale porch of the moon,
Faint and sweet as a starlit shrine,
Over the gloom
Of the crimson bloom
We saw the Gates of Ivory shine ;
And, lulled and lured by the lullaby tune
Of the cradling airs that drowsily creep
From blossom to blossom, and lazily croon
Through the heart of the midnight's mystic noon,
We came to the Gates of the City of Sleep.

Faint and sweet as a lily's repose
On the broad black breast of a midnight lake,
The City delighted the cradling night.
Like a straggling palace of cloud it rose.
Its towers were crowned with a crystal light
Like the starry crown of a white snowflake
As they pierced in a wild white pinnaced crowd,
Through the dusky wreaths of enchanted cloud
That swirled all round like a witch's hair.

And we heard, as the sound of a great sea sighing,
The sigh of the sleepless world of care ;
And we saw strange shadowy figures flying

Up to the Ivory Gates and beating
With pale hands, long and famished and thin.
Like blinded birds we saw them dash
Against the cruelly gleaming wall.
We heard them wearily moan and call
With sharp starved lips for ever entreating
The pale doorkeeper to let them in.

And still, as they beat, again and again,
We saw on the moon-pale lintels a splash
Of crimson blood like a poppy-stain
Or a wild red rose from the gardens of pain
That sigh all night like a ghostly sea
From the City of Sleep to Gethsemane.

And then, as we neared that mighty crowd
An old blind man came, crying aloud
To greet us, as once the blind man cried
In the Bible picture—you know we tried
To paint that print, with its Eastern sun ;
But the reds and the yellows *would* mix and run,
And the blue of the sky made a horrible mess
Right over the edge of the Lord's white dress.

And the old blind man, just as though he had eyes,
Came straight to meet us ; and all the cries
Of the crowd were hushed ; and a strange sweet calm
Stole through the air like a breath of the balm
That was wafted abroad from the Forest of Thyme
(For it rolled all round that curious clime
With its magical clouds of perfumed trees).
And the blind man cried, " Our help is at hand,
O, brothers, remember the old command,
Remember the frankincense and myrrh,
Make way, make way for those little ones there.

Make way, make way, I have seen them afar
Under a great white Eastern star ;
For I am the mad blind man who sees ! ”
Then he whispered, softly—*Of such as these . . .*
And through the hush of the cloven crowd
We passed to the gates of the City, and there
Our fairy heralds cried aloud—
Open your Gates. Don't stand and stare.
These are the Children for whom our King
Made all the star-worlds dance in a ring !

At once, like a sorrow that melts from the heart
In tears, the slow gates melted apart ;
And into the City we passed like a dream ;
And then, in one splendid marching stream
The whole of that host came following through.

We were only children, just like you ;
Children, ah, but we felt so grand
As we led them—although we could understand
Nothing at all of the wonderful song
That rose all round as we marched along.

SONG.

You that have seen how the world and its glory
Change and grow old like the love of a friend ;
You that have come to the end of the story,
You that were tired ere you came to the end ;
You that are weary of laughter and sorrow,
Pain and pleasure, labour and sin,
Sick of the midnight and dreading the morrow,
Ah, come in ; come in.

*You that are bearing the load of the ages ;
You that have loved overmuch and too late ;
You that confute all the saws of the sages ;
You that served only because you must wait,
Knowing your work was a wasted endeavour ;
You that have lost and yet triumphed therein,
Add loss to your losses and triumph for ever ;
Ah, come in ; come in.*

And we knew as we went up that twisted street,
With its violet shadows and pearl-pale walls,
We were coming to Something strange and sweet,
For the dim air echoed with elfin calls ;
And, far away, in the heart of the City,
A murmur of laughter and revelry rose,—
A sound that was faint as the smile of Pity,
And sweet as a swan-song's golden close.

And then, once more, as we marched along,
There surged all round us that wonderful song ;
And it swung to the tramp of our marching feet ;
But ah, it was tenderer now and so sweet
That it made our eyes grow wet and blind,
And the whole wide world seem mother-kind,
Folding us round with a gentle embrace,
And pressing our souls to her soft sweet face.

SONG.

*Dreams—dreams—ah, the memory blinding us,
Blinding our eyes to the way that we go ;
Till the new sorrow come, once more reminding us
Blindly of tears that have long ceased to flow.*

Mother-mine, whisper we, yours was the love for me !

*Still, though our paths lie lone and apart,
Yours is the true love, shining above for me,
Yours are the kind eyes, hurting my heart.*

Dreams—dreams—ah, how shall we sing of them,

Dreams that we loved with our head on her breast.

Dreams—dreams—and the cradle-sweet swing of them ;

Ay, for her voice was the sound we loved best.

Can we remember at all or, forgetting it,

Can we recall for a moment the gleam

Of our childhood's delight and the wonder begetting it,

Wonder awakened in dreams of a dream ?

And, once again, from the heart of the City

A murmur of tenderer laughter rose,

A sound that was faint as the smile of Pity,

And sweet as a swan-song's golden close ;

And it seemed as if some wonderful Fair

Were charming the night of the City of Dreams,

For, over the mystical din out there,

The clouds were coloured with flickering gleams,

And a roseate light like the day's first flush

Quivered and beat on the towers above,

And we heard through the curious crooning hush

An elfin song that we used to love.

Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn . . .

And the soft wind blew it the other way ;

And all that we heard was—Cow's in the corn ;

But we never heard anything half so gay !

And ever we seemed to be drawing nearer

That mystical roseate smoke-wreathed glare,

And the curious music grew louder and clearer,

Till Mustard-seed said, " We are lucky, you see,

We've arrived at a time of festivity ! "

And so to the end of the street we came,
And turned a corner, and—there we were,
In a place that glowed like the dawn of day,
A crowded clamouring City square
Like the cloudy heart of an opal aflame
With the lights of a great Dream-Fair.
Thousands of children were gathered there,
Thousands of old men, weary and gray,
And the shouts of the showmen filled the air—
This way ! This way ! This way !

And *See-saw ; Margery Daw ;* we heard a rollicking
shout,
As the swing-boats hurtled over our heads to the tune of
the roundabout ;
And *Little Boy Blue, come blow up your horn,* we heard
the showmen cry,
And *Dickory Dock, I'm as good as a clock,* we heard the
swings reply.

This way, this way to your Heart's Desire ;
Come, cast your burdens down ;
And the pauper shall mount his throne in the skies,
And the king be rid of his crown :
And souls that were dead shall be fed with fire
From the fount of their ancient pain,
And your lost love come with the light in her eyes
Back to your heart again.

Ah, here be sure she shall never prove
Less kind than her eyes were bright.
This way, this way to your old lost love,
You shall kiss her lips to-night.
This way for the smile of a dead man's face
And the grip of a brother's hand.
This way to your childhood's heart of grace
And your home in Fairy-land.

Dickory Dock, I'm as good as a clock, d'you hear my swivels chime ?

To and fro as I come and go, I keep eternal time.

O, little Bo-peep, if you've lost your sheep and don't know where to find 'em,

Leave 'em alone and they'll come home, and carry their tails behind 'em.

And *See-saw ; Margery Daw ;* there came the chorussing shout,

As the swing-boats answered the roaring tune of the rollicking roundabout ;

Dickory, dickory, dickory, dock, d'you hear my swivels chime ?

Swing ; swing ; you're as good as a king if you keep eternal time.

Then we saw that the tunes of the world were one ;
And the metre that guided the rhythmic sun
Was at one, like the ebb and the flow of the sea,
With the tunes that we learned at our mother's knee ;
The beat of the horse-hoofs that carried us down
To see the fine Lady of Banbury Town ;
And so, by the rhymes that we knew, we could tell
Without knowing the others—that all was well.

And then our brains began to spin ;
For it seemed as if that mighty din
Were no less than the cries of the poets and sages
Of all the nations in all the ages ;
And, if they could only beat out the whole
Of their music together, the guerdon and goal
Of the world would be reached with one mighty shout,
And the dark dread secret of Time be out.
And nearer, nearer they seemed to climb,
And madder and merrier rose the song,

And the swings and the see-saws marked the time ;
 For this was the maddest and merriest throng
 That ever was met on a holy-day
 To dance the dust of the world away ;
 And madder and merrier, round and round
 The whirligigs whirled to the whirling sound,
 Till it seemed that the mad song burst its bars
 And mixed with the song of the whirling stars,
 The song that the rhythmic Time-Tides tell
 To seraphs in Heaven and devils in Hell ;
 All, all the songs of the world in chime
 With the universal rhythm and rhyme
 Were nearing the secret of Space and Time ;
 The song of that ultimate mystery
 Which only the mad blind men who see,
 Led by the laugh of a little child,
 Can utter ; ay, wilder and yet more wild
 It maddened, till now—it was out—it was out !
 Full song from the starry roundabout—

And—just as it seemed that the sky must split
 With the infinite flash and the thunder of it,
 Oh, stranger than thunder, from deep to deep,
 The wheel of the whole world spun to sleep,
 For the round of the wheel so swiftly was run
 That the swift and the still were wedded and one,
 One silent music from pole to pole,
 And man's heart one with the heart of the whole,
 In a song like a light in the soul, unheard,
 But clear as the joy in the cry of a bird :

*A child was born in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem !
 A child was born in Bethlehem ! Ah, hear my fairy fable ;
 For I have seen the King of Kings, no longer thronged with
 angel wings,
 But croodling like a little babe, and cradled in a stable.*

*The wise men came to greet him with their gifts of myrrh
and frankincense.*

*Gold and myrrh and frankincense they brought to make
him mirth ;*

*And would you know the way to win to little brother
Peterkin,*

*My childhood's heart shall guide you through the glories
of the earth.*

*A child was born in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem, in Bethlehem !
The wise men came to welcome him. A star stood o'er the
gable ;*

*And there they saw the King of Kings, no longer thronged
with angel wings,*

But croodling like a little babe, and cradled in a stable.

*And creeping through the music once again the fairy cry
Came tingling o'er the snowy towers to lead us on to
Peterkin.*

*Once more the fairy bugles blew from lands beyond the
sky,*

*And we all groped out together, dazed and blind, we
knew not why.*

*Out through the City's farther gates we went to look
for Peterkin ;*

*Out, out into the dark Unknown, and heard the clamour
die*

Far, far away behind us as we trotted on to Peterkin.

Then once more along the rare

Forest-paths we groped our way.

Here the glow-worm's league-long glare

Turned the Wild Thyme night to day.

There we passed a sort of whale

Sixty feet in length or more,

But we knew it was a snail

Even when we heard it snore.

Often through the glamorous gloom
Almost on the top of us
We beheld a beetle loom
Like a hippopotamus.
Once or twice a spotted toad
Like a mountain wobbled by
With a rolling moon that glowed
Through the skin-fringe of its eye.

Once a caterpillar bowed
Down a leaf of Ygdrasil
Like a sunset-coloured cloud
Sleeping on a quiet hill :
Once we came upon a moth
Fast asleep with outspread wings,
Like a mighty tissued cloth
Woven for the feet of kings.

There above the woods in state
Many a temple dome that glows
Delicately like a great
Rainbow-coloured bubble rose :
Though they were but flowers on earth,
Oh, we dared not enter in,
Knowing in that strange re-birth
Less than awe were more than sin !

Yet their mystic anthems came
Sweetly to our listening ears ;
And their burden was the same—
“ No more sorrow, no more tears !
Whither Peterkin has gone
You, assuredly, shall go.
When your wanderings are done,
All he knows you, too, shall know ! ”

So we thought we'd onward roam
Till earth's Smallest Flower appeared,
With a less tremendous dome,
Less divinely to be feared :
Then, perchance, if we should dare
Timidly to enter in,
Someone who was kneeling there
Might have news of Peterkin.

At last we saw a crimson porch
Far away, like a dull red torch
Burning in the purple gloom ;
And a great ocean of perfume
Rolled round us as we drew anear,
And then we strangely seemed to hear
The shadow of a mighty psalm,
A sound as if a golden sea
Of music swung in utter calm
Against the shores of Eternity ;
And then we saw a dreaming dome
And walls that did not seem to tower
So high ; and knew that we had come,
At last, to that sweet House of Grace
Which wise men find in every place—
The Temple of the Smallest Flower.

And there—alas—our fairy friends
Whispered, “ Here our kingdom ends.
You must enter in alone,
But your souls will surely show
Whither Peterkin is gone
And the road that you must go.
We, poor fairies, have no souls !
Hark, the warning hare-bell tolls ; ”
So “ Good-bye, good-bye,” they said,
“ Dear little seekers-for-the-dead.”

They vanished. Ah, but as they went
 We heard their voices softly blent
 In a still unearthly song
 That seemed to make us wise and strong.
 For it was like the holy calm
 That fills the bosomed rose with balm,
 Or blessings that the twilight breathes
 Where the honeysuckle wreathes
 Between young lovers and the sky
 As on banks of flowers they lie ;
 And with wings of rose and green
 Elfin children pass unseen,
 Singing their sweet lullaby,—

We shall walk with them on earth

When we pass the gates of birth,

Die to live, and live to die.

Though they cannot see us now,

Kiss them, once, on cheek and brow.

Then, good-night, with lullaby.

.

Only a flower ? Those carven walls,
 Those cornices and coronals,
 The splendid crimson porch, the thin
 Strange sounds of singing from within. . . .

Through the scented arch we stept,
 Pushed back the soft petallic door,
 And down the velvet aisles we crept.
 Was it a Flower—no more ?

For one of the voices that we heard,
 A child's voice, clear as the voice of a bird,
 Was it not ?—nay, it could not be !
 And a woman's voice that tenderly

Answered him in fond refrain,
 And pierced our hearts with sweet sweet pain,
 As if dear Mary-mother hung
 Above some little child, and sung
 Between the waves of that golden sea
 The cradle-songs of Eternity ;
 And, while in her deep smile he basked,
 Answered whatsoe'er he asked.

*What is there hid in the heart of a rose,
 Mother-mine ?
 Ah, who knows, who knows ?
 A man that died on a lonely hill
 May tell you, perhaps, but none other will,
 Little child.*

*What does it take to make a rose,
 Mother-mine ?
 The God that died to make it knows
 It takes the world's eternal wars,
 It takes the moon and all the stars,
 It takes the might of heaven and hell
 And the everlasting Love as well,
 Little child.*

But there, in one strange shrine apart
 Within the Temple's holiest heart,
 We came upon a blinding light,
 Suddenly, and a burning throne
 Of pinnaced glory, wild and white.
 We could not see Who reigned thereon ;
 For, all at once, as a wood-bird sings,
 The aisles were full of great white wings
 Row above mystic burning row ;
 And through the splendour and the glow

We saw four angels, great and sweet,
With outspread wings and folded feet,
Come gliding down from a heaven within
The golden heart of Paradise ;
And in their hands, with laughing eyes,
Lay little brother Peterkin.

And all around the Temple of the Smallest of the Flowers
The glory of the angels made a star for little Peterkin ;
For all the Kings of Splendour and all the Heavenly
Powers

Were gathered there together in the fairy forest bowers
With all their globed and radiant wings to make a star
for Peterkin,
The star that shone upon the East, a star that still is ours,
Whene'er we hang our stockings up, a star of wings for
Peterkin.

Then all, in one great flash, was gone—
A voice cried, " Hush, all's well ! "
And we stood dreaming there, alone,
In darkness. Who can tell
The mystic quiet that we felt,
As if the woods in worship knelt.
Far off we heard a bell
Tolling strange human folk to prayer
Through fields of sunset-coloured air.

Then we heard footsteps, faint and far,
And—as it seemed—we woke.
Remembered skies, great star by star
Upon our vision broke.
Field over field of heavenly blue
Rose over us ; then a voice we knew
Softly and gently spoke—
" See, they are sleeping by the side
Of that dear little one—who died."

PART V.—THE HAPPY ENDING.

WE told dear father all our tale
That night before we went to bed,
And at the end his face grew pale,
And he bent over us and said
He too, he too, had wandered there
A long and lonely watch to keep
Before the gates of the City of Sleep ;
But, till we came, he did not dare
Even to dream of entering in,
Or even to hope for Peterkin.
He was the poor blind man, he said,
And we—how low he bent his head !
Then he called mother near ; and low
He whispered to us—" Prompt me now ;
For I forget that song we heard,
But you remember every word."
Then memory came like a breaking morn,
And we breathed it to him—*A child was born !*
And there he drew us to his breast
And softly murmured all the rest.—

*The wise men came to greet him with their gifts of myrrh
and frankincense.*

*Gold and myrrh and frankincense they brought to make
him mirth ;*

*And would you know the way to win to little brother
Peterkin,*

*My childhood's heart shall guide you through the glories
of the earth.*

Then he looked up and mother knelt
Beside us. Oh, her eyes were bright !
Her arms were like a lovely belt
All round us as we said good-night
To father : *he* was crying now,
But they were happy tears, somehow ;
For there we saw dear mother lay
Her cheek against his cheek and say—
“ Hush, let me kiss those tears away.”

DEDICATION.

*WHAT can a wanderer bring
To little ones loved like you ?
You have songs of your own to sing
That are far more steadfast and true,
Crumbs of pity for birds
That flit o'er your sun-swept lawn,
Songs that are dearer than all our words
With a love that is clear as the dawn.*

*What should a dreamer devise,
In the depths of his wayward will,
To deepen the gleam of your eyes
Who can dance with the Sun-child still ?
Yet you glanced on his lonely way,
You cheered him in dream and deed,
And his heart is o'erflowing, o'erflowing to-day
With a love that—you never will need.*

*What can a pilgrim teach
To dwellers in fairy-land ?
Truth that excels all speech
You murmur and understand !
All he can sing you he brings ;
But—more than all songs can say—
One thing more that the King of Kings
Will take from the child on the way.*

*It has wings ! they return thro' the night
To a sky where the light lives yet,
Fresh as the dawn on his mountain-height
And the path that his feet forget,
Wings from the night re-arisen
Because they remember your eyes
And the gleam that brought to his earthly prison
The passion of Paradise.*

*Kind little eyes that I love,
Eyes forgetful of mine,
In a dream I am bending above
Your sleep, and you open and shine ;
And I know as my own grow blind
With a lonely prayer for your sake,
He will hear—even me—little eyes that were kind,
God bless you, asleep or awake.*

FORTY SINGING SEAMEN

AND OTHER POEMS.

TO GARNETT.

FORTY SINGING SEAMEN.

“ In our lands be Beeres and Lyons of dyvers colours as ye redd, grene, black, and white. And in our land be also Unicornes and these Unicornes slee many Lyons. . . . Also there dare no man make a lye in our lande, for if he dyde he sholde incontynent be sleyn.”—*Mediæval Epistle of Pope Prester John*.

I.

ACROSS the seas of Wonderland to Mogadore we plodded,
 Forty singing seamen in an old black barque,
 And we landed in the twilight where a Polyphemus
 nodded

With his battered moon-eye winking red and yellow
 through the dark !

For his eye was growing mellow,

Rich and ripe and red and yellow,

As was time, since old Ulysses made him bellow in the
 dark !

Cho.—Since Ulysses bunged his eye up with a pine-torch
 in the dark !

II.

Were they mountains in the gloaming or the giant's ugly
 shoulders

Just beneath the rolling eyeball, with its bleared and
 vinous glow,

Red and yellow o'er the purple of the pines among the
boulders

And the shaggy horror brooding on the sullen slopes
below,

Were they pines among the boulders
Or the hair upon his shoulders ?

We were only simple seamen, so of course we didn't
know.

Cho.—We were simple singing seamen, so of course we
couldn't know.

III.

But we crossed a plain of poppies, and we came upon a
fountain

Not of water, but of jewels, like a spray of leaping fire ;
And behind it, in an emerald glade, beneath a golden
mountain,

There stood a crystal palace, for a sailor to admire ;
For a troop of ghosts came round us,
Which with leaves of bay they crowned us,

Then with grog they wellnigh drowned us, to the
depth of our desire !

Cho.—And 'twas very friendly of them, as a sailor can
admire !

IV.

There was music all about us, we were growing quite
forgetful

We were only singing seamen from the dirt of London-
town,

Though the nectar that we swallowed seemed to vanish
half regretful

As if we wasn't good enough to take such vittles down,

When we saw a sudden figure,
 Tall and black as any nigger,
 Like the devil—only bigger—drawing near us with a
 frown !
Cho.—Like the devil—but much bigger—and he wore a
 golden crown !

V.

And “ what’s all this ? ” he growls at us ! With dignity
 we chaunted,
 “ Forty singing seamen, sir, as won’t be put upon ! ”
 “ What ? Englishmen ? ” he cries, “ Well, if ye don’t
 mind being haunted,
 Faith, you’re welcome to my palace. I’m the famous
 Prester John !
 Will ye walk into my palace ?
 I don’t bear ’ee any malice !
 One and all ye shall be welcome in the halls of Prester
 John ! ”
Cho.—So we walked into the palace and the halls of Prester
 John !

VI.

Now the door was one great diamond and the hall a
 hollow ruby—
 Big as Beachy Head, my lads, nay bigger by a half !
 And I sees the mate wi’ mouth agape, a-staring like a
 booby,
 And the skipper close behind him, with his tongue out
 like a calf !
 Now the way to take it rightly
 Was to walk along politely
 Just as if you didn’t notice—so I couldn’t help but laugh !
Cho.—For they both forgot their manners and the crew
 was bound to laugh !

VII.

But he took us through his palace and, my lads, as I'm
a sinner,

We walked into an opal like a sunset-coloured cloud.

"My dining-room," he says, and, quick as light we saw
a dinner

Spread before us by the fingers of a hidden fairy
crowd ;

And the skipper, swaying gently

After dinner, murmurs faintly,

"I looks to-wards you, Prester John, you've done us
very proud !"

Cho.—And we drank his health with honours, for he
done us very proud !

VIII.

Then he walks us to his garden where we sees a feathered
demon

Very splendid and important on a sort of spicy tree !

"That's the Phoenix," whispers Prester, "which all
edicated seamen

Knows the only one existent, and *he's* waiting for to
flee !

When his hundred years expire

Then he'll set hisself a-fire

And another from his ashes rise most beautiful to
see !"

Cho.—With wings of rose and emerald most beautiful to
see !

IX.

Then he says, "In yonder forest there's a little silver
river,

And whosoever drinks of it, his youth shall never die !

The centuries go by, but Prester John endures for ever
With his music in the mountains and his magic on the
sky !

While *your* hearts are growing colder,

While your world is growing older,

There's a magic in the distance, where the sea-line
meets the sky."

Cho.—It shall call to singing seamen till the fount o'
song is dry !

X.

So we thought we'd up and seek it, but that forest fair
defied us.

First a crimson leopard laughs at us most horrible
to see.

Then a sea-green lion came and sniffed and licked his
chops and eyed us,

While a red and yellow unicorn was dancing round a
tree !

We was trying to look thinner,

Which was hard, because our dinner

Must ha' made us very tempting to a cat o' high
degree !

Cho.—Must ha' made us very tempting to the whole
menarjeree !

XI.

So we scuttled from that forest and across the poppy
meadows

Where the awful shaggy horror brooded o'er us in the
dark !

And we pushes out from shore again a-jumping at our
shadows,

And pulls away most joyful to the old black barque !

And home again we plodded
While the Polyphemus nodded
With his battered moon-eye winking red and yellow
through the dark.
Cho.—Oh, the moon above the mountains, red and
yellow through the dark !

XII.

Across the seas of Wonderland to London-town we
blundered,
Forty singing seamen as was puzzled for to know
If the visions we had seen was caused by—here again we
pondered—
A tippie in a vision forty thousand years ago.
 Could the grog we *dreamt* we swallowed
 Make us *dream* of all that followed ?
We were only simple seamen, so of course we didn't
know !
Cho.—We were simple singing seamen, so of course we
could not know !

IN TIME OF WAR.

(1905.)

I.

TO-NIGHT, on Bagshot heath, the purple heather
 Rolls like dumb thunder to the smouldering west ;
 And ragged fire-cleft clouds are massed together
 Above the scarred old common's broken breast ;

And there are hints of blood between the boulders,
 Red glints of fiercer blossom, bright and bold ;
 And round the shaggy mounds and sullen shoulders
 The gorse repays the sun with savage gold.

And now, as in the west the light grows holy,
 And all the hollows of the heath grow dim,
 Far off, a sulky rumble rolls up slowly
 Where guns at practice growl their evening hymn.

And here and there in bare clean yellow spaces
 The print of horse-hoofs like an answering cry
 Strikes strangely on the sense from lonely places
 Where there is nought but empty heath and sky.

The print of warlike hoofs, where now no figure
 Of horse or man along the sky's red rim
 Breaks on the low horizon's rough black rigour
 To make the gorgeous waste less wild and grim ;

Strangely the hoof-prints strike, a Crusoe's wonder,
Framed with sharp furze among the footless fells,
A menace and a mystery, rapt asunder,
As if the whole wide world contained nought else,—

Nought but the dumb despair of desolation
Between us and that wild, how far, how near,
Where, foul with slaughter, nation grapples nation,
And Hatred grips the clay-cold hand of Fear.

II.

And far above the purple heath the sunset stars awaken,
And ghostly hosts of cloud across the West begin to
stream,
And all the low soft winds with muffled cannonades are
shaken,
And all the blood-red blossom draws aloof into a
dream ;

A dream—no more—and round the dream the clouds
are curled together ;
A dream of two great stormy hosts entrenched along
the sky ;
For there against the low red heavens each sombre ridge
of heather
Up-heaves a hedge of bayonets around a battle-cry ;

Melts in the distant battlefield or brings the dream so
near it
That, almost, as the rifted clouds around them swim
and reel,
A thousand grey-lipped faces flash ! The listening heart
can hear it—
The sharp command that lifts as one the levelled
lines of steel.

And through the savage thunders there are silent
shadows creeping
With murderous gleams of light, and then—a leaping
sea-like roar
Where foe and foe are met ; and then—a long low sound
of weeping
As Death laughs out across the world, another fight is
o'er.

-But oh, no dark undying hell, where Dante walked in
vision,
Heaved with such horror from the grave, as on this
mangled plain
The red-smeared clay that once was man, beneath the
stars' derision
Writhes on the tangled wires through all the bestial
shapes of pain.

Only, be sure, for those who dare beyond the fringe to
enter,
Midway twixt foe and friend there lies, with pale and
blood-soiled face,
A King that wears a crown of thorns, and, blood-red in
the centre
Of quivering out-stretched hands and feet, the sigil of
His grace.

There, to those lips that speak no more, what answer shall
be given ?
O, pale, pale King, so deadly mute beneath the
unshaken stars,
Who shall deny Thy Kingdom there, though heaven and
earth were riven
With the last roar of onset in the world's intestine wars.

The laugh is Death's ! He laughs as erst o'er hours that
England cherished,—

“ Count up, count up the stricken homes that wail the
first-born son.

Count by your starved and fatherless the tale of what
hath perished,

Then gather with your foes and ask if you—or I—have
won.”

III.

Hasten the Kingdom, England. The days darken.

We would not have thee slacken watch or ward ;
Nor doff thine armour till the whole world hearken ;
Nor, till Time bid thee, lay aside the sword.

Far off, the vision that our souls have cherished
Fades, like the City of God ; yet, as at need,
England, God help thee, till all hope has perished,
Let not one gleam go past thee without heed.

Though oft a wingéd Spirit had shone before us,
Quickening with love each separate striving mind ;
Brutal in arms, an earth-bound Dinosaur,
The State still crawled a thousand years behind.

Still, on the standards of the world's blind powers,
Lion and Bear and Eagle sullenly brood ;
And still, behind our lying peace, there glowers
The wild beast, waiting, for his feast of blood.

Up the red road of struggle man has risen
Far, since fierce Erda chose her conquering few.
Armed with clean steel, they burst their terrene prison,
And rose, elect from battle, tried and true.

But now Time mocks his own young battle-glory.
Chivalry slinks behind his loaded mines.
With meaner murderous lips War tells her story,
And round her cunning brows no laurel shines.

In fire upon the midnight's moving pages ;
In stone, above the graves of Rome and Tyre ;
One doom's word speaks, from all those vanished ages,—
There is no hope, if man can rise no higher.

Strive for it, England, while the last rays linger,
Wake the deep godhead in thy soul once more,
While Time is thine, ere yet the moving finger
Write on the skies in lightning—*thine no more.*

THE DEATH OF CHOPIN.

SING to me ! Ah, remember how
 Poor Heine here in Paris leant
 Watching me play at the fall of day
 And following where the music went,
 Till that old cloud upon his brow
 Was almost smoothed away.

“ Do roses in the moonlight flame
 Like this and this ? ” he said and smiled ;
 Then bent his head as o’er his dead
 Brother might breathe some little child
 The accustomed old half-jesting name,
 With all its mockery fled,

Like summer lightnings, far away,
 In heaven. Oh, what Bohemian nights
 We passed down there for that brief year
 When art revealed her last delights ;
 And then, that night, that night in May
 When Hugo came to hear !

“ Do roses in the moonlight glow
 Like this and this ? ” I could not see
 His eyes, and yet—they were quite wet,
 Blinded, I think ! What should I be
 If in that hour I did not know
 My own diviner debt ?

For God has made this world of ours
Out of His own exceeding pain,
As here in art man's bleeding heart
Slow drop by drop completes the strain ;
And dreams of death make sweet the flowers
Where lovers meet to part.

Recall, recall my little room
Where all the masters came that night,
Came just to hear me, Meyerbeer,
Lamartine, Balzac ; and no light
But my two candles in the gloom ;
Though she, she too was there,

George Sand. This music once unlocked
My heart. She took the gold she prized.
Her novel gleams no richer : dreams
Like mine are best unanalysed.
And she forgets her poor bemocked
Prince Karol, now, it seems.

I was Prince Karol ; yes, and Liszt
Count Salvator Albani : she
My Floriani—all so far
Away !—My dreams are like the sea
That round Majorca sighed and kissed
Each softly mirrored star.

Oh, what a golden round of hours
Our island villa knew : we two
Alone with-sky and sea, the sigh
Of waves, the warm unfathomed blue.
With what a chain of nights like flowers
We bound Love, she and I.

What music, what harmonious
Glad triumphs of the world's desire
Where passion yearns to God and burns
Earth's dross out with its own pure fire,
Or tolls like some deep angelus
Through Death's divine nocturnes.

"Do roses in the moonlight glow
Like this and this?" What did she think
Of him whose hands at Love's command
Made Life as honey o'er the brink
Of Death drip slow, darkling and slow?
Ah, did she understand?

She studied every sob she heard,
She watched each dying hope she found;
And yet she understood not one
Poor sorrow there that like a wound
Gaped, bleeding, pleading—for one word—
No? And the dream was done.

For her—I am "wrapped in incense gloom,
In drifting clouds and golden light."
Once I was shod with fire and trod
Beethoven's path through storm and night.
It is too late now to resume
My monologue with God.

Well, my lost love, you were so kind
In those old days. Ah yes; you came
When I was ill! In dreams you still
Will come? (Do roses always flame
By moonlight, thus?) I, too, grow blind
With wondering if she will.

Yet, Floriani, what am I
To you, though love was life to me ?
My life consumed like some perfumed
Pale altar-flame beside the sea.
You stood and smiled and watched it die !
You, you whom it illumed,

Could you not feed it with your love ?
Am I not starving here and now ?
Sing, sing ! I'd miss no smile or kiss—
No roses in Majorca glow
Like this and this—so death may prove
Best—ah, how sweet life is !

IN CLOAK OF GRAY.

I.

LOVE's a pilgrim, cloaked in gray,
 And his feet are pierced and bleeding.
 Have ye seen him pass this way
 Sorrowfully pleading ?
 Ye that weep the world away,
 Have ye seen King Love to-day ?—

II.

Yea, we saw him ; but he came
 Poppy-crowned and white of limb !
 Song had touched his lips with flame,
 And his eyes were drowsed and dim ;
 And we kissed the hours away
 Till night grew rosier than the day.—

III.

Hath he left you ?—Yea, he left us
 A little while ago,
 Of his laughter quite bereft us
 And his limbs of snow.
 We know not why he went away
 Who ruled our revels yesterday.—

IV.

Because ye did not understand

Love cometh from afar,

A pilgrim out of Holy Land

Guided by a star.

Last night he came in cloak of gray,

Begging. Ye knew him not. He went his way.

A RIDE FOR THE QUEEN.

QUEEN of queens, O lady mine,
 You who say you love me,
 Here's a cup of crimson wine
 To the stars above me ;
 Here's a cup of blood and gall
 For a soldier's quaffing !
 What's the prize to crown it all ?
 Death ? I'll take it laughing !
 I ride for the Queen to-night !

Though I find no knightly fee
 Waiting on my lealty,
 High upon the gallows-tree
 Faithful to my fealty,
 What had I but love and youth,
 Hope and fame in season ?
 She has proved that more than truth
 Glorifies her treason.

Would that other do as much ?
 Ah, but if in sorrow
 Some forgotten look or touch
 Pierce her heart to-morrow,
 She might love me yet, I think ;
 So her lie befriends me,
 Though I know there's darker drink
 Down the road she sends me.

Ay, one more great chance is mine,
 (Can I faint or falter ?)
She shall pour my blood like wine,
 Make my heart her altar,
Burn it to the dust ! For, there,
 What if o'er the embers
She should stoop and—I should hear—
 “ *Hush ! Thy love remembers !* ”

One more chance for every word
 Whispered to betray me,
While she buckled on my sword
 Smiling to allay me.
One more chance ; ah, let me not
 Mar her perfect pleasure.
Love shall pay me, jot by jot,
 Measure for her measure.

Faith shall think I never knew,
 I will be so fervent.
Doubt shall dream I dreamed her true,
 As her war-worn servant.
Whoso flouts her spotless name
 (Love, I wear thy token !)
He shall face one sword of flame
 Ere the lie be spoken.

All the world's a-foam with may,
 (Fragrant as her bosom !)
Could I find a sweeter way
 Through the year's young blossom,
Where her warm red mouth on mine
 Woke my soul's desire ? . . .
Hey ! The cup of crimson wine,
 Blood and gall and fire !

Castle Doom or Gates of Death ?
 (Smile again for pity !)
" Boot and horse," my lady saith,
 " Spur against the City,
Bear this message ! " God and she
 Still forget the guerdon.
Nay, the rope is on the tree !
 That shall bear the burden !
 I ride for the Queen to-night !

THE HIGHWAYMAN.

PART ONE.

I.

THE wind was a torrent of darkness among the gusty trees.

The moon was a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas.

The road was a ribbon of moonlight over the purple moor,

And the highwayman came riding—

Riding—riding—

The highwayman came riding, up to the old inn-door.

II.

He'd a French cocked-hat on his forehead, a bunch of lace at his chin,

A coat of the claret velvet, and breeches of brown doe-skin.

They fitted with never a wrinkle. His boots were up to the thigh.

And he rode with a jewelled twinkle,

His pistol butts a-twinkle,

His rapier hilt a-twinkle, under the jewelled sky.

III.

Over the cobbles he clattered and clashed in the dark inn-yard.

He tapped with his whip on the shutters, but all was locked and barred.

He whistled a tune to the window, and who should be waiting there

But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,

Bess, the landlord's daughter,

Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.

IV.

And dark in the dark old inn-yard a stable-wicket creaked

Where Tim the ostler listened. His face was white and peaked.

His eyes were hollows of madness, his hair like mouldy hay,

But he loved the landlord's daughter,

The landlord's red-lipped daughter.

Dumb as a dog he listened, and he heard the robber say—

V.

“One kiss, my bonny sweetheart, I'm after a prize to-night,

But I shall be back with the yellow gold before the morning light;

Yet, if they press me sharply, and harry me through the day,

Then look for me by moonlight,

Watch for me by moonlight,

I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way.”

VI.

He rose upright in the stirrups. He scarce could reach
her hand,
But she loosened her hair in the casement. His face
burnt like a brand
As the black cascade of perfume came tumbling over
his breast ;
And he kissed its waves in the moonlight,
(O, sweet black waves in the moonlight !)
Then he tugged at his rein in the moonlight, and galloped
away to the west.

PART TWO.

I.

He did not come in the dawning. He did not come at noon ;
And out of the tawny sunset, before the rise of the moon,
When the road was a gypsy's ribbon, looping the purple
moor,
A red-coat troop came marching—
Marching—marching—
King George's men came marching, up to the old inn-
door.

II.

They said no word to the landlord. They drank his ale
instead.
But they gagged his daughter, and bound her, to the
foot of her narrow bed.
Two of them knelt at her casement, with muskets at
their side !
There was death at every window ;
And hell at one dark window ;
For Bess could see, through her casement, the road that
he would ride.

III.

They had tied her up to attention, with many a sniggering jest.

They had bound a musket beside her, with the muzzle beneath her breast !

" Now, keep good watch ! " and they kissed her.

She heard the dead man say—

Look for me by moonlight ;

Watch for me by moonlight ;

I'll come to thee by moonlight, though hell should bar the way !

IV.

She twisted her hands behind her ; but all the knots held good !

She writhed her hands till her fingers were wet with sweat or blood !

They stretched and strained in the darkness, and the hours crawled by like years,

Till, now, on the stroke of midnight,

Cold, on the stroke of midnight,

The tip of one finger touched it ! The trigger at least was hers !

V.

The tip of one finger touched it. She strove no more for the rest.

Up, she stood up to attention, with the muzzle beneath her breast.

She would not risk their hearing ; she would not strive again ;

For the road lay bare in the moonlight ;

Blank and bare in the moonlight ;

And the blood of her veins, in the moonlight, throbbed to her love's refrain.

VI.

Tlot-tlot ; tlot-tlot ! Had they heard it ? The horse-
hoofs ringing clear ;
Tlot-tlot, tlot-tlot, in the distance ? Were they deaf that
they did not hear ?
Down the ribbon of moonlight, over the brow of the hill,
The highwayman came riding,
Riding, riding !
The red-coats looked to their priming ! She stood up,
straight and still.

VII.

Tlot-tlot, in the frosty silence ! *Tlot-tlot,* in the echoing
night !
Nearer he came and nearer. Her face was like a light.
Her eyes grew wide for a moment ; she drew one last
deep breath,
Then her finger moved in the moonlight,
Her musket shattered the moonlight,
Shattered her breast in the moonlight and warned him
—with her death.

VIII.

He turned. He spurred to the west ; he did not know
who stood
Bowed, with her head o'er the musket, drenched with
her own blood !
Not till the dawn he heard it, and his face grew grey
to hear
How Bess, the landlord's daughter,
The landlord's black-eyed daughter,
Had watched for her love in the moonlight, and died in
the darkness there.

IX.

Back, he spurred like a madman, shouting a curse to
 the sky,
 With the white road smoking behind him and his rapier
 brandished high.
 Blood-red were his spurs in the golden noon ; wine-red
 was his velvet coat ;
 When they shot him down on the highway,
 Down like a dog on the highway,
 And he lay in his blood on the highway, with a bunch
 of lace at his throat.

■ * * * * * * * *

X.

*And still of a winter's night, they say, when the wind is in
 the trees,
 When the moon is a ghostly galleon tossed upon cloudy seas,
 When the road is a ribbon of moonlight over the purple
 moor,
 A highwayman comes riding—
 Riding—riding—
 A highwayman comes riding, up to the old inn-door.*

XI.

*Over the cobbles he clatters and clangs in the dark inn-
 yard.
 He taps with his whip on the shutters, but all is locked
 and barred.
 He whistles a tune to the window, and who should be wait-
 ing there
 But the landlord's black-eyed daughter,
 Bess, the landlord's daughter,
 Plaiting a dark red love-knot into her long black hair.*

THE HAUNTED PALACE.

COME to the haunted palace of my dreams,
 My crumbling palace by the eternal sea,
 Which, like a childless mother, still must croon
 Her ancient sorrows to the cold white moon,
 Or, ebbing tremulously,
 With one pale arm, where the long foam-fringe gleams,
 Gather her rustling garments, for a space
 Of muffled weeping, round her dim white face.

A princess dwelt here once : long, long ago
 This tower rose in the sunset like a prayer ;
 And, through the witchery of that casement, rolled
 In one soft cataract of faëry gold
 Her wonder-woven hair.
 Her face leaned out and took the sacred glow
 Of evening, like the star that listened, high
 Above the gold clouds of the western sky.

Was there no prince behind her in the gloom,
 No crimson shadow of his rich array ?
 Her face leaned down to me : I saw the tears
 Bleed through her eyes with the slow pain of years,
 And her mouth strove to say—
 “ Friend, is there any message, from the tomb
 Where love lies buried ? ” But she only said—
 “ O, friend, canst thou not save me from my dead ? ”

Then saw I, and mine own tears made response,
Her woman's heart come breaking through her eyes ;
And, as I stood beneath the tower's gray wall,
She let the soft waves of her deep hair fall
 Like flowers from Paradise
Over my fevered face : then all at once
Pity was passion ; and like a sea of bliss
Those waves rolled o'er me drowning for her kiss.

* * * * *

Seven years we dwelt together in that tower,
Seven years in that old palace by the sea,
And sitting at that casement, side by side,
She told me all her pain : how love had died
 Now for all else but me ;
Yet how she had loved that other. Like a flower
Her red lips parted and with low sweet moan
She pressed their tender suffering on mine own.

And always with vague eyes she gazed afar,
Out through the casement o'er the changing tide ;
And slowly was my heart's hope brought to nought
That some day I should win each wandering thought
 And make her my soul's bride.
Still, still she gazed across the cold sea-bar ;
Even with her hand in mine, still, still and pale,
Waited and watched for the unreturning sail.

And I, too, watched and waited as the years
Flowed on ; and slowly was I brought to feel
How on my lips she met her lover's kiss,
How my heart's pulse begat an alien bliss ;
 And cold and hard as steel
For me those eyes were, though their tender tears
Were salt upon my cheek ; and then one night
I saw a sail come through the pale moonlight.

And like an alien ghost I stole away,
 And like a breathing lover he returned ;
 And in the woods I dwelt, or sometimes crept
 Out in the gray dawn while the lovers slept
 And the great sea-tides yearned
 Against the iron shores ; and faint and gray
 The tower and the shut casement rose above :
 And on the earth I sobbed out all my love.

At last, one royal rose-hung night in June,
 When the warm air like purple Hippocrene
 Brimmed the dim valley and sparkled into stars,
 I saw them cross the foam-lit sandy bars
 And dark pools, glimmering green,
 To bathe beneath the honey-coloured moon :
 I saw them swim out from that summer shore,
 Kissed by the sea, but they returned no more.

* * * * *

And into the dark palace, like a dream
 Remembered after long oblivious years,
 Through the strange open doors I crept and saw
 As a poor pagan might, with reverent awe,
 And deep adoring tears,
 The moonlight through that painted window stream
 Over the soft wave of their vacant bed.
 There sank I on my knees and bowed my head,

For as a father by a cradle bows,
 Remembering two dead children of his own,
 I knelt ; and by the cry of the great deep
 Their love seemed like a murmuring in their sleep,
 A little fevered moan,
 A little tossing of childish arms that shows
 How dreams go by ! “ If I were God,” I wept,
 “ I would have pity on children while they slept.”

* * * * *

The days, the months, the years drift over me.

 This is my habitation till I die.

Nothing is changed ; they left that open book

Beside the window. Did he sit and look

 Up at her face as I

Looked while she read it, and the enchanted sea

 With rich eternities of love unknown

 Fulfilled the low sweet music of her tone ?

So did he listen, looking in her face ?

 And did she ever pause, remembering so

The heart that bore the whole weight of her pain

Until her own heart's love returned again ?

 In the still evening glow

I sit and listen in this quiet place,

 And only hear—like notes of phantom birds—

 Their perished kisses and little broken words.

SUMMER.

(AN ODE.)

Now like a pageant of the Golden Year
 In rich memorial pomp the hours go by,
 With rose-embroidered flags unfurled
 And tasselled bugles calling through the world
 Wake, for your hope draws near !
 Wake, for in each soft porch of azure sky,
 Seen through each arch of pale green leaves, the Gate
 Of Eden swings apart for Summer's royal state.

Ah, when the Spirit of the moving scene
 Has entered in, the splendour will be spent !
 The flutes will cease, the gates will close ;
 Only the scattered crimson of the rose,
 The wild wood's hapless queen,
 Dis-kingdomed, will declare the way he went ;
 And, in a little while, her court will go,
 Pass like a cloud and leave no trace on earth below.

Tell us no more of Autumn, the slow gold
 Of fruitage ripening in a world's decay,
 The falling leaves, the moist rich breath
 Of woods that swoon and crumble into death
 Over the gorgeous mould :
 Give us the flash and scent of keen-edged may
 Where wastes that bear no harvest yield their bloom,
 Rude crofts of flowering nettle, bents of yellow broom.

The very reeds and sedges of the fen
Open their hearts and blossom to the sky,
The wild thyme on the mountain's knees
Unrolls its purple market to the bees ;
Unharvested of men
The Traveller's Joy can only smile and die.
Joy, joy alone the throbbing whitethroats bring,
Joy to themselves and heaven ! They were but born
to sing !

And see, between the northern-scented pines,
The whole sweet summer sharpens to a glow !
See, as the well-spring splashes cool
Over a shadowy green fern-fretted pool
The mystic sunbeam shines
For one mad moment on a breast of snow,
A warm white shoulder and a glowing arm
Up-flung, where some swift Undine sinks in shy alarm.

And if she were not all a dream, and lent
Life for a little to your own desire,
Oh, lover in the hawthorn lane,
Dream not you hold her, or you dream in vain !
The violet, spray-besprent
When from that plunge the rainbows flashed like fire,
Will scarce more swiftly lose its happy dew
Than eyes which Undine haunts will cease to shine
on you.

What though the throstle pour his heart away,
A happy spendthrift of uncounted gold,
Swinging upon a blossomed briar
With soft throat lifted in a wild desire
To make the world his may.
Ever the pageant through the gates is rolled
Further away ; in vain the rich notes throng
Flooding the mellow noon with wave on wave of song.

The feathery meadows like a lilac sea,
Knee-deep with honeyed clover red and white,
Roll billowing : the crisp clouds pass
Trailing their soft blue shadows o'er the grass ;
The skylark, mad with glee,
Quivers, up, up, to lose himself in light ;
And, through the forest, like a fairy dream
Through some dark mind, the ferns in branching beauty
stream.

Hast thou eternal loveliness to spend,
Summer, that thou canst take so little heed
Of these that serve thee but to die,
Blind trappings of thy tragic pageantry ?
Show us the end, the end !
We too, with human hearts that break and bleed,
Move to the night that rounds our dream of bliss,
And feel our last farewell in love's first kiss.

Oh that our hearts might pass away with thee,
Burning and pierced and full of thy sweet pain,
Burst through the gates with thy swift soul,
Hunt thy most white perfection to the goal,
Nor wait, once more to see
Thy chaliced lilies rotting in the rain,
Thy ragged yellowing banners idly hung
In woods that have forgotten all the songs we sung !

BLACKBERRIES.

BEYOND the blazing bramble-patch
They found the whispering shade,
A farmer's boy with laughing lips,
A sun-burnt village maid.

Her lips were blue with blackberries.
Her finger-tips were red.

"And what shall take the stain away
This day at all," she said. .

He's pulled the rosebud from his coat—
A bonnier ne'er was blown—
He's caught and held her bird-like hand
As though 'twere all his own.

It was a white rose took the stain
From her dainty finger-tips ;
But red as life-blood was the flower
That darkened at her lips.

AT DAWN.

O HESPER-PHOSPHOR, far away

Shining, the first, the last white star,
Hear'st thou the strange, the ghostly cry,
That moan of an ancient agony
From purple forest to golden sky

Shivering over the breathless bay ?
It is not the wind that wakes with the day ;
For see, the gulls that wheel and call,
Beyond the tumbling white-topped bar,
Catching the sun-dawn on their wings,
Like snow-flakes or like rose-leaves fall,
Flutter and fall in airy rings ;
And drift, like lilies ruffling into blossom
Upon a golden lake's unwrinkled bosom.

Are not the forest's deep-lashed fringes wet
With tears ? Is not the voice of all regret
Breaking out of the dark earth's heart ?
She too, she too, has loved and lost ; and we—
We that remember our lost Arcady,
Have we not known, we too,
The primal greenwood's arch of blue,
The radiant clouds at sunrise curled
Around the brows of the golden world ;
The marble temples, washed with dew,
To which with rosy limbs aflame
The violet-eyed Thalassian came,

Came, pitiless, only to display
How soon the youthful splendour dies away ;
 Came, only to depart
Laughing across the gray-grown bitter sea ;
For each man's life is earth's epitome,
And though the years bring more than aught they take,
Yet might his heart and hers well break
Remembering how one prayer must still be vain,
 How one fair hope is dead,
 One passion quenched, one glory fled
With those first loves that never come again.

How many years, how many generations,
 Have heard that sigh in the dawn,
When the dark earth yearns to the unforgotten nations
 And the old loves withdrawn,
Old loves, old lovers, wonderful and unnumbered
 As waves on the wine-dark sea,,
'Neath the tall white towers of Troy and the temples
 that slumbered
 In Thessaly ?

From the beautiful palaces, from the miraculous portals,
 The swift white feet are flown !
They were taintless of dust, the proud, the peerless
 Immortals
 As they sped to their loftier throne !
Perchance they are there, earth dreams, on the shores of
 Hesper,
 Her rosy-bosomed Hours,
Listening the wild fresh forest's enchanted whisper,
 Crowned with its new strange flowers ;
Listening the great new ocean's triumphant thunder
 On the stainless unknown shore,

While that perilous queen of the world's delight and
wonder
Comes white from the foam once more.

When the mists divide with the dawn o'er those glitter-
ing waters,

Do they gaze over unoared seas—

Naiad and nymph and the woodland's rose-crowned
daughters

And the Oceanides ?

Do they sing together, perchance, in that diamond
splendour,

That world of dawn and dew,

With eyelids twitching to tears and with eyes grown tender

The sweet old songs they knew,

The songs of Greece ? Ah, with harp-strings mute do
they falter

As the earth like a small star pales ?

When the heroes launch their ship by the smoking altar

Does a memory lure their sails ?

Far, far away, do their hearts resume the story

That never on earth was told,

When all those urgent oars on the waste of glory

Cast up its gold ?

Are not the forest fringes wet

With tears ? Is not the voice of all regret

Breaking out of the dark earth's heart ?

She too, she too, has loved and lost ; and though

She turned last night in disdain

Away from the sunset-embers,

From her soul she can never depart ;

She can never depart from her pain.

Vainly she strives to forget ;

Beautiful in her woe,

She awakes in the dawn and remembers.

THE SWIMMER'S RACE.

I.

BETWEEN the clover and the trembling sea
 They stand upon the golden-shadowed shore
 In naked boyish beauty, a strenuous three,
 Hearing the breakers' deep Olympic roar ;
 Three young athletes poised on a forward limb,
 Mirrored like marble in the smooth wet sand,
 Three statues unlike marble, born to die.
 The blue horizon rim
 Recedes, recedes upon a lovelier land,
 And England dreams beneath a Grecian sky.

II.

The dome of heaven is like one drop of dew,
 Quivering and clear and cloudless, but for one
 Crisp bouldered Alpine range that blinds the blue
 With snowy gorges glittering to the sun :
 Forward the runners lean, with outstretched hand
 Waiting the word—see, how the light relieves
 The silken rippling muscles as they start
 Spurning brown clots of sand,
 Then skimming lightlier till the goal receives
 The winner, head thrown back and lips apart.

III.

Now on a dry grey sun-kissed dune they lie
At rest for a moment, panting as they breathe,
And gazing upward at the unbounded sky
Sink slowly into the drifting sand beneath.
Their hands among the wild sea-poppies stray,
And through their fingers let the warm sand stream
Over them, dusking all their sun-burnt white
With veils of silver grey,
Till, mixed into the distant gazer's dream
Of earth and heaven, they seem to sink from sight.

IV.

But one, athirst for the salt breeze, oppressed
With heat, has cast his brown young body free :
With arms behind his head and heaving breast
He lies and gazes at the cool bright sea ;
So young Leander, dreaming at high noon
Of Hero, longed to see the twilight drown
All but her star across that waste of waves ;
Nor could he dream how soon
Those colder breasts than hers must draw him down,
To crueller kisses, in their dark sea-caves.

V.

Now to their feet they leap and, with a shout,
Plunge through the glittering breakers without fear,
Breast the green-arching billows, and still out,
As if each dreamed the arms of Hero near ;

Now like three sunbeams through the surf they dart ;
Now like three foam-flakes, melting out of sight,
They are one with the infinite splendour of the sea ;
Buried in Beauty's heart ;
Lost in a myriad waves of mystic light
As life is lost in immortality.

THE APHRODITE OF MELOS.

WAS it with arms outstretched, as from a throne
 She hailed her god returning home in power ;
 And, from that earth-spun vesture, the slack zone
 Freed half the immortal Form, an ivory tower
 Shining through heaven ; secure of her own reign ;
 Conquering the conqueror ; while her sightless face
 Gazed on, through all the conquered years to be ?
 Or did those blunt bright shoulders, once, in vain,
 Hold suppliant arms out wide, with subtler grace
 To Adon, by the blue Ægean sea ?

Burn under her proud foot, O passionate earth.
 Her splendour beacons to a loftier goal,
 Where, slipping earthward from that last re-birth
 The sensuous vesture leaves the essential soul.
 Eternal Beauty, even on earth revealed
 Above Time's girdling mists, thou still canst show
 This radiant prophecy of the great new dawn ;
 The sculptured breasts, each like a soft white shield,
 And the firm body, like a slope of snow,
 Out of the slipping dream-stuff half withdrawn.

SONG.

(AFTER THE FRENCH OF ROSTAND.)

OH, many a lover sighs
Beneath the summer skies
For black or hazel eyes
All day.

No light of hope can mar
My whiter brighter star ;
I love a Princess far
Away.

Now you that haste to meet
Your love's returning feet
Must plead for every sweet
Caress ;
But, day and night and day,
Without a prayer to pray,
I love my far away
Princess.

THE NET OF VULCAN.

FROM peaks that clove the heavens asunder
 The hunchback god with sooty claws
 Loomed o'er the night, a cloud of thunder,
 And hurled the net of mortal laws ;
 It flew, and all the world grew dimmer ;
 Its blackness blotted out the stars,
 Then fell across the rosy glimmer
 That told where Venus couched with Mars.

And, when the steeds that draw the morning
 Spurned from their Orient hooves the spray,
 All vainly soared the lavrock, warning
 Those tangled lovers of the day :
 Still with those twin white waves in blossom,
 Against the warrior's rock-broad breast,
 The netted light of the foam-born bosom
 Breathed like a sea at rest.

And light was all that followed after,
 Light the derision of the sky,
 Light the divine Olympian laughter
 Of kindlier gods in days gone by :
 Low to her lover whispered Venus,
 " The shameless net be praised for this—
 When night herself no more could screen us
 It snared us one more hour of bliss."

NIOBE.

How like the sky she bends above her child,
 One with the great horizon of her pain !
 No sob from our low seas where woe runs wild,
 No weeping cloud, no momentary rain,
 Can mar the heaven-high visage of her grief,
 That frozen anguish, proud, majestic, dumb.
 She stoops in pity above the labouring earth,
 Knowing how fond, how brief
 Is all its hope, past, present, and to come,
 She stoops in pity, and yearns to assuage its dearth.

Through that fair face the whole dark universe
 Speaks, as a thorn-tree speaks thro' one white flower ;
 And all those wrenched Promethean souls that curse
 The gods, but cannot die before their hour,
 Find utterance in her beauty. That fair head
 Bows over all earth's graves. It was her cry
 Men heard in Rama when the twisted ways
 With children's blood ran red.
 Her silence towers to Silences on high ;
 And, in her face, the whole earth's anguish prays.

It is the pity, the pity of human love
 That strains her face, upturned to meet the doom,
 And her deep bosom, like a snow-white dove
 Frozen upon its nest, ne'er to resume

Its happy breathing o'er the golden brace
That she must shield till death. Death, death alone
Can break the anguished horror of that spell.
The sorrow on her face
Is sealed : the living flesh is turned to stone ;
She knows all, all, that Life and Time can tell.

Ah, yet, her woman's love, so vast, so tender,
Her woman's body, hurt by every dart,
Braving the thunder, still, still hide the slender
Soft frightened child beneath her mighty heart.
She is all one mute immortal cry, one brief
Infinite pang of such victorious pain
That she transcends the heavens and bows them
down !
The majesty of grief
Is hers, and her dominion must remain
Eternal. God nor man usurps that crown.

ON A RAILWAY PLATFORM.

A DRIZZLE of drifting rain

And a blurred white lamp o'erhead,
That shines as my love will shine again
In the world of the dead.

Round me the wet black night,

And, afar in the limitless gloom,
Crimson and green, two blossoms of light,
Two stars of doom.

But the night of death is aflame

With a torch of back-blown fire,
And the coal-black deeps of the quivering air
Rend for my soul's desire.

Leap, heart, for the pulse and the roar

And the lights of the streaming train
That leaps with the heart of thy love once more
Out of the mist and the rain.

Out of the desolate years

The thundering pageant flows ;
But I see no more than a window of tears
Which her face has turned to a rose.

OXFORD REVISITED.

CHANGED, estranged, like a ghost, I pass the familiar
portals,

Echoing now like a tomb, dark, and forgetful, and cold.
Strange as the rays of the sun to a shadow astray among
mortals,

Youth in its kingdom goes by. This was our kingdom
of old.

Dusk of the walls that I know on the unknown fugitive
faces

Turns them to friends of my own, wraiths of an earlier
May.

Avatars? Ghosts? If I breathed, in the dim unforget-
table places

Names that were theirs, they would hear—turn, and
remember and stay.

Still, oh, fairer by far than that golden bough in the
shadows,

Over the Isis the may, clustering in crimson and white,
Whispers to phantom canoes. They glide through the
dusk of the meadows,

Lapping with little splashes and ripples of silvery
light.

Still, through the beautiful City, the long black wings
of the scholar

Stream with the short black gowns. Ever as Tom
tower chimes

Windows brighten with lights in a world of music and
colour,

Lilac and tinkling strings, laughter and whispering
limes.

Over the Radcliffe Dome the moon like the ghost of a
flower

Watching the death of the day, drifts through the
deepening sky.

Clouds in the after-glow sleep, over glistening steeple
and tower.

Dark under Magdalen walls, the Cher like a dream
goes by.

Back, we come back, poor ghosts, to all that the wanderer
misses

Out in the roar of the world—the world that was
heaven to us then ;

Back from the tumult and greed, the chaos and bound-
less abysses,

Like monks from a pilgrimage stealing in bliss to their
cloisters again.

City of dreams that we lost, accept now the gift we
inherit—

Love, such a love as we knew not of old in the blaze
of our noon,

We that have found thee at last, half City, half heavenly
spirit,

While over a mist of spires the sunset mellows the
moon.

THE THREE SHIPS.

(To an old Tune.)

I.

As I went up the mountain-side,
 The sea below me glittered wide,
 And, Eastward, far away, I spied
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day,
 The three great ships that take the tide
 On Christmas Day in the morning.

II.

Ye have heard the song, how these must ply
 From the harbours of home to the ports o' the sky !
 Do ye dream none knoweth the whither and why
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day,
 The three great ships go sailing by
 On Christmas Day in the morning ?

III.

Yet, as I live, I never knew
 That ever a song could ring so true,
 Till I saw them break thro' a haze of blue
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day ;
 And the marvellous ancient flags they flew
 On Christmas Day in the morning !

IV.

From heights above the belfried town
I saw that the sails were patched and brown,
But the flags were a-flame with a great renown
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day,
And on every mast was a golden crown
 On Christmas Day in the morning.

V.

Most marvellous ancient ships were these !
Were their prows a-plunge to the Chersonese,
For the pomp of Rome or the glory of Greece,
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day ?
Were they out on a quest for the Golden Fleece
 On Christmas Day in the morning ?

VI.

And the sun and the wind they told me there
How goodly a load the three ships bear,
For the first is gold and the second is myrrh
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day ;
And the third is frankincense most rare
 On Christmas Day in the morning.

VII.

They have mixed their shrouds with the golden sky,
They have faded away where the last dreams die . . .
Ah yet, will ye watch, when the mist lifts high
 On Christmas Day, on Christmas Day ?
Will ye see three ships come sailing by
 On Christmas Day in the morning ?

SLUMBER-SONGS OF THE MADONNA.

PRELUDE.

DANTE saw the great white Rose
 Half unclothe ;
 Dante saw the golden bees
 Gathering from its heart of gold
 Sweets untold,
 Love's most honeyed harmonies.

Dante saw the threefold bow
 Strangely glow,
 Saw the Rainbow Vision rise,
 And the Flame that wore the crown
 Bending down
 O'er the flowers of Paradise.

Something yet remained, it seems :
 In his dreams
 Dante missed—as angels may
 In their white and burning bliss—
 Some small kiss
 Mortals meet with every day.

What remains? I pass and hear
 Everywhere,
 Hear, or see in silent eyes
 Just the song she still would sing
 Thus—a-swing
 O'er the cradle where He lies.

I.

Sleep, little baby, I love thee ;
Sleep, little king, I am bending above thee !
How should I know what to sing
Here in my arms as I swing thee to sleep ?
Hushaby low,
Rockaby so,
Kings may have wonderful jewels to bring,
Mother has only a kiss for her king !
Why should my singing so make me to weep ?
Only I know that I love thee, I love thee,
Love thee, my little one, sleep.

II.

Is it a dream ? Ah yet, it seems
Not the same as other dreams !
I can but think that angels sang,
When thou wast born, in the starry sky,
And that their golden harps out-rang
While the silver clouds went by !

The morning sun shuts out the stars,
Which are much loftier than the sun ;
But, could we burst our prison-bars
And find the Light whence light begun,
The dreams that heralded thy birth
Were truer than the truths of earth ;
And, by that far immortal Gleam,
Soul of my soul, I still would dream !

A ring of light was round thy head,
The great-eyed oxen nigh thy bed
Their cold and innocent noses bowed !
Their sweet breath rose like an incense cloud

In the blurred and mystic lanthorn light.
About the middle of the night
The black door blazed like some great star
With a glory from afar,
Or like some mighty chrysolite
Wherein an angel stood with white
Blinding arrowy bladed wings
Before the throne of the King of kings ;
And, through it, I could dimly see
A great steed tethered to a tree.

Then, with crimson gems aflame
Through the door the three kings came,
And the black Ethiop unrolled
The richly broidered cloth of gold,
And poured forth before thee there
Gold and frankincense and myrrh !

III.

See, what a wonderful smile ! Does it mean
That my little one knows of my love ?
Was it meant for an angel that passed unseen,
And smiled at us both from above ?
Does it mean that he knows of the birds and the flowers
That are waiting to sweeten his childhood's hours,
And the tales I shall tell and the games he will play,
And the songs we shall sing and the prayers we shall pray
In his boyhood's May,
He and I, one day ?

IV.

For in the warm blue summer weather
We shall laugh and love together :

I shall watch my baby growing,
I shall guide his feet,
When the orange trees are blowing
And the winds are heavy and sweet !
When the orange orchards whiten
I shall see his great eyes brighten
To watch the long-legged camels going
Up the twisted street,
When the orange trees are blowing
And the winds are sweet.

*What does it mean ? Indeed, it seems
A dream ! Yet not like other dreams.*

We shall walk in pleasant vales,
Listening to the shepherd's song,
I shall tell him lovely tales
All day long :
He shall laugh while mother sings
Tales of fishermen and kings.

He shall see them come and go
O'er the wistful sea,
Where rosy oleanders blow
Round blue Lake Galilee,
Kings with fishers' ragged coats
And silver nets across their boats,
Dipping through the starry glow,
With crowns for him and me !
Ah, no ;
Crowns for him, not me !

*Rockaby so ! Indeed, it seems
A dream ! yet not like other dreams !*

V.

Ah, see what a wonderful smile again !
Shall I hide it away in my heart,
To remember one day in a world of pain
When the years have torn us apart,
Little babe,
When the years have torn us apart ?

Sleep, my little one, sleep,
Child with the wonderful eyes,
Wild miraculous eyes,
Deep as the skies are deep !
What star-bright glory of tears
Waits in you now for the years
That shall bid you waken and weep ?
Ah, in that day, could I kiss you to sleep
Then, little lips, little eyes,
Little lips that are lovely and wise,
Little lips that are dreadful and wise !

VI.

Clenched little hands like crumpled roses
Dimpled and dear,
Feet like flowers that the dawn uncloses,
What do I fear ?
Little hands, will you ever be clenched in anguish ?
White little limbs, will you droop and languish ?
Nay, what do I hear ?
I hear a shouting, far away,
You shall ride on a kingly palm-strewn way
Some day !

But when you are crowned with a golden crown
And throned on a golden throne,
You'll forget the manger of Bethlehem town
And your mother that sits alone
Wondering whether the mighty king
Remembers a song she used to sing,
Long ago,
"Rockaby so,
*Kings may have wonderful jewels to bring,
Mother has only a kiss for her king !*" . . .

Ah, see what a wonderful smile, once more !
He opens his great dark eyes !
Little child, little king, nay, hush, it is o'er
My fear of those deep twin skies,—
Little child,
You are all too dreadful and wise !

VII.

But now you are mine, all mine,
And your feet can lie in my hand so small,
And your tiny hands in my heart can twine,
And you cannot walk, so you never shall fall,
Or be pierced by the thorns beside the door,
Or the nails that lie upon Joseph's floor ;
Through sun and rain, through shadow and shine
You are mine, all mine !

IN THE COOL OF THE EVENING.

IN the cool of the evening, when the Eden whispers
 waken,
 When the heart turns homeward and the fettered mind
 is free,
 When the little wild-flower censers through the forest
 aisles are shaken,
 Is it but the wind that walketh up the valley from
 the sea ?

For they say 'tis but the sunset airs that flow across the
 heather,
 Whispering through the ferns in all the valley's lonely
 nooks.
 They say 'tis but the sunset airs that bow the reeds
 together,
 And wash the solemn pools with fire along our wester-
 ing brooks.

IN the beauty of the twilight, in the Garden that He
 loveth,
 They have veiled His lovely vesture with the darkness
 of a name.
 Through the silence of His mountains it is but the wind
 that moveth—
 No more ; but Oh, the miracle, the miracle is the
 same !

In the cool of the evening, when the sky is an old story,
Dying, where the sunset turns to dawn for you and me ;
Hush ! . . . the fringes of His garment, in the fading
golden glory,
Softly rustling as He cometh up our valley from the
sea.

A ROUNDHEAD'S RALLYING SONG.

I.

How beautiful is the battle,
 How splendid are the spears,
 When our banner is the sky
 And our watchword *Liberty*,
 And our kingdom lifted high above the years.

II.

How purple shall our blood be,
 How glorious our scars,
 When we lie there in the night
 With our faces full of light
 And the death upon them smiling at the stars.

III.

How golden is our hauberk,
 And steel, and steel our sword,
 And our shield without a stain
 As we take the field again,
 We whose armour is the armour of the Lord !

ROBIN HOOD.

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS.

To MY WIFE.

You believed in this play when it was first written, eighteen years ago, and you always hoped to see it one day. It is dedicated to you now, a little too late for that, on the eve of its first appearance in England, because the sunlight of those youthful hopes and memories always hovers over it, and that sunlight always belonged to you.

PERSONS OF THE DRAMA.

ROBIN	.	.	.	Earl of Huntingdon, known as "Robin Hood."
LITTLE JOHN				} Outlaws and followers of "Robin Hood."
FRIAR TUCK				
WILL SCARLET				
MUCH, THE MILLER'S SON				
PRINCE JOHN.				
KING RICHARD, CŒUR DE LION.				
BLONDEL.	.	.	.	King Richard's Minstrel.
THORN-WHISPER	.	.	.	King of the Forest Sprites.
FERN-WHISPER	.	.	.	Queen of the Forest Sprites.
BRAMBLE-SCRATCH.	.	.	.	A Sprite.
THE SHERIFF OF NOTTING-HAM.				
FITZWALTER.	.	.	.	Father of Marian.
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF			.	A Fool.
ARTHUR PLANTAGENET	.	.	.	Nephew to Prince John, a boy of about ten years of age.
ELINOR	.	.	.	Sister of Prince Richard and Prince John.
MARIAN FITZWALTER	.	.	.	Known as Maid Marian, betrothed to Robin Hood.
JENNY	.	.	.	Maid to Marian.
WIDOW SCARLET	.	.	.	Mother of Will Scarlet.
PRIORRESS OF KIRKLEE.				

Serfs, peasants, mercenaries, a novice, nuns, courtiers, soldiers, retainers, &c.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—NIGHT.

The borders of the forest. The smouldering embers of a Saxon homestead. The SHERIFF and his men are struggling with a SERF.

Serf. No, no, not that! Not that! If you should
blind me
God will repay you. Kill me out of hand!

Enter PRINCE JOHN and several of his retainers.

John. Who is this night-jar?

[The retainers laugh.]

Surely, Master Sheriff,
You should have cut its tongue out first. Its cries
Tingle so hideously across the wood
They'll wake the King in Palestine. Small wonder
That Robin Hood evades you.

Sheriff *[to the SERF]*. Silence, dog,
Know you not better than to make this clamour
Before Prince John?

Serf. Prince John! It is Prince John!
For God's love save me, sir!

John. Whose thrall is he?

Sheriff. I know not, sir, but he was caught red-handed
Killing the King's deer. By the forest law
He should of rights be blinded ; for as you see,

[*He indicates the SERF's right hand.*]

His right hand lacks the thumb and arrow finger,
'Tis not his first deer at King Richard's cost.

John. 'Twill save you trouble if you say at mine.

Serf. Prince, when the Conqueror came,
They burned my father's homestead with the rest
To make the King a broader hunting-ground.
I have hunted here for food. How could I bear
To hear my hungry children crying ? Prince,
They'll make good bowmen for your wars one day.

John. He is much too fond of ".prince." He'll never
live
To see a king. Whose thrall ?—his iron collar,
Look, is the name not on it ?

Sheriff. Sir, the name
Is filed away. He would have broken the ring
In half an hour. He is one of those rank thieves
That follow Robin Hood.

John. Did you not serve
Huntingdon once yourself ?

Sheriff. Ay, sir, but then
He had large estates. He has wasted all his substance
To feed these rogues. When we have served our writ
And made him outlaw, there'll be little to seize.
They say he hopes much from the King's return.

John. This mongrel, here, slinks at his heel, you say.
Take him away. Blind him, or what you will.
But wait—perhaps he knows where we may trap
His generous master. Answer me, you dog.
Where is Huntingdon ?

Serf. Where you'll never find him.

John. Oh, ho ! The dog is faithful ! Take him away.
Get your red business done. I shall require
Your men to ride with me.

Sheriff [to his men]. Take him out yonder,
A bow-shot into the wood, so that his clamour
Do not offend my lord. Delay no time,
The irons are hot by this. They'll give you light
Enough to blind him by.

Serf [crying out and struggling as he is forced back into the forest]. No, no, not that !
God will repay you ! Kill me out of hand !

Sheriff [to PRINCE JOHN]. There is a kind of justice in
all this,
The irons being heated in that fire, my lord,
Which was his hut an hour ago.

[Some of the men take the glowing irons from the fire and go into the wood.]

No need
To parley with him either. The snares are laid
For Robin Hood. He goes this very night
To his betrothal feast.

John. Betrothal feast !

Sheriff. At Lord Fitzwalter's castle, sir.

John. That's good !
There will be one more guest there than he thought.
Ourselves are riding thither. We intended
My Lady Marian for a happier fate
Than bride to Robin Hood. Your plans are laid
To capture him ?

Sheriff [*consequently*]. It was our purpose, sir,
To serve the writ of outlawry upon him,
And capture him as he came forth.

John. That's well.
Then—let him disappear—you understand ?

Sheriff. I have your warrant, sir ? Death ? A great
Earl ?

John. Why, first declare him outlawed at his feast !
'Twill gladden the tremulous heart of old Fitzwalter
With his prospective son-in-law ; and then—
No man will overmuch concern himself
Whither an outlaw goes. You understand ?

Sheriff. It shall be done, sir.

John. But the Lady Marian !
By heaven, I'll take her. I'll banish old Fitzwalter
If he prevent my will in this. You'll bring
How many men to ring the castle round ?

Sheriff. A good five-score of bowmen.

John. Then I'll take her
This very night as hostage for Fitzwalter,

Since he consorts with outlaws. These grey rats
Will gnaw my kingdom's heart out. For 'tis mine,
This England, now or later. They that hold
By Richard, as their absent king, would make
My rule a usurpation. God, am I
My brother's keeper?

[*There is a cry in the forest from the SERF, who immediately afterwards appears at the edge of the glade, shaking himself free from his guards. He seizes a weapon and rushes at PRINCE JOHN. One of the retainers runs him through, and he falls at the PRINCE'S feet.*]

John. That's a happy answer!

Sheriff [*stooping over the body*]. He is dead.

John. I am sorry. It were better sport
To send him groping like a hoodman blind
Through Sherwood, whimpering for his Robin. Come,
I'll ride with you to this betrothal feast.
Now for my Lady Marian !

[*Exeunt all. A pause. The scene darkens. Shadowy figures creep out from the thickets.*]

First Old Man [stretching his arms up to Heaven]. God,
am I
My brother's keeper?
It was Cain's word. He said it!

First Woman [kneeling by the body]. The blood of
Abel crying. . . .

A Blind Man. I am glad
They blinded me those many years ago.

At times I see a better world than this.
But tell me, is there any light here still ?
I feel a hot breath on my face. The dark
Is better for us all.

First Woman [still kneeling by the body and whispering
to the others]. Keep him away.
The dead man is his son. He need not know.

A Child. Mother, I'm hungry.

Blind Man. When my son comes back
There will be plenty. My boy is a rare hunter.
He's much too quick and clever for the Sheriff.
He'll bring you something good.

First Woman. God pity thee.

Blind Man. And when the King comes home from
the Crusade
We shall have better times.

First Old Man. Ay, when the King
Comes home from the Crusade.

Child. Mother, I'm hungry.

Second Woman. My friends, the child will starve. We
must have food.

First Old Man. Hist ! who comes here—a forester ?

The Blind Man. We'd best
Slip back into the dark.

First Woman. No, stay ! All's well.
There's Shadow-of-a-Leaf, good Lady Marian's fool,
Behind him.

Blind Man. Ah, they say there's elfin blood
In Shadow-of-a-Leaf, but I've no hopes of more
From him than wild bees' honey-bags.

Enter LITTLE JOHN, a giant figure laden with a sack.
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, a slender figure in Lincoln green,
follows him, carrying a bunch of long ferns.

Little John. My friends,
My master hath sent me, fearing ye might hunger.

First Old Man. Thy master ?

Little John. Robin Hood.

Second Woman [*falling on her knees*]. God bless his
name.
God bless the kindly name of Robin Hood.

Little John [*giving them food*]. 'Tis wellnigh all that's
left him ; and to-night
He goes to his betrothal feast.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [*in a rapt whisper*]. Little John,
As we came through the forest—it was so dark
That I believe I saw thy master's Master.
He rode on a grey donkey.

Little John. A grey donkey !
Why didst not borrow it then ? I am bent double
With that great sack.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Ah, John, thou art donkey enough
For thine own burden, and thy back is broad.
My donkey went invisible, and they strewed
No palms before him, but the west wind bowed
Myriads of branching ferns across his path,

And ferns, you know, are the fringe of a strange kingdom,
The whispering edges of a shining country
That's dark to mortal eyes. Ah, here he comes.

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF moves back, strewing ferns, as if before a vision invisible to others.]

With nothing but that shadow of a cross
On his grey back, and only a fool to cry
Hosanna, and hold his bridle, and lead him home,
While the great King is fighting for a grave
In lands beyond the sea. Come, Neddy, come,
We'll thread the glad Gate Beautiful again.
Hosanna !

[Exit SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, strewing ferns.]

Blind Man. 'Tis a strange creature. He was born
Beyond the bracken, I think.

Little John. 'Twas he that brought
Word of your plight to Robin Hood. He flits
Like moonshine through the forest. I must away.
This makes a sad betrothal night.

First Woman. That minds me.
Couched in the bracken yonder, we overheard
The Sheriff tell Prince John . . .

Little John. Prince John !

First Old Man. You'd best
Warn Robin Hood. They're laying a trap for him.
Ay ! Now I mind me of it ! I heard 'em say
They'd take him at the castle.

Little John. To-night ?

First Old Man.

To-night !

Fly, for God's love, or you'll be there too late.
And yet, you'd best be careful. There's five-score
In ambush round the castle.

Little John.

I'll go through,

An' if I have to break five hundred heads !

[He rushes off through the forest. The others go into the thickets to the left with their sack of food. The scene darkens. A soft light, as of the moon, shines between the ferns at the back of the glade, showing the king and queen of the woodland sprites.]

Fern-Whisper. Yet one night more a mortal hand
unbars

The shining Gates into our happier woods
That seem so far beyond these woods of earth,
Yet whisper in all men's hearts to call them home.

Thorn-Whisper. Last night the Gates were shut, and
I heard weeping.

Men, women, children, beat upon the Gates
That guard our Shining Glen. They could not sleep.
O, Whisper of Ferns, could we but breathe our peace
On hearts that cannot sleep.

Fern-Whisper.

Yet one night more,

Dear Robin Hood has opened the Gates wide,
And all those broken hearts can enter in.

Thorn-Whisper. Yet one night more we woodland
sprites may steal

Out through the Gates. A darker night may come
When they must close for ever, and we no more
Shall breathe our peace through Sherwood.

Fern-Whisper. Ah, but love
And love's deep sacrifice can open them ;
For when a mortal hurts himself to help
Another, then he thrusts the Gates wide open
Between his world and ours.

Thorn-Whisper. O, Whisper of Ferns,
That kind of love is rare ; for now the Gates
Are almost always closed.

Fern-Whisper. Yet one night more.
Hark, how the shining hosts begin to sing
Within the Gates. Wait here, and we shall see
What weary souls, by grace of Robin Hood,
This night shall enter dreamland. See, they come !

[The soft light deepens in a hollow among the ferns, and the Gates of the Shining Glen are seen swinging slowly open. The woodland sprites are heard, singing within.]

SONG OF THE WOODLAND SPRITES.

The Forest shall conquer ! The Forest shall conquer !
The Forest shall conquer !
Your world is growing old ;
But a Princess sleeps in the greenwood,
Whose hair is brighter than gold.

The Forest shall conquer ! The Forest shall conquer !
The Forest shall conquer !
O hearts that bleed and burn,
Her lips are redder than roses,
Who sleeps in the faery fern.

The Forest shall conquer ! The Forest shall conquer !
The Forest shall conquer !
By the Beauty that wakes anew
Milk-white with the fragrant hawthorn
In the drip of the dawn-red dew.

The Forest shall conquer ! The Forest shall conquer !
The Forest shall conquer !
O hearts that are weary of pain,
Come back to your home in Faerie
And wait till she wakes again.

Fern-Whisper [coming out into the glade and holding up her hands to the evening star beyond the tree-tops]. Shine, shine, dear star of Love, yet one night more.

SCENE II.—A BANQUETING HALL IN
FITZWALTER'S CASTLE.

The guests are assembling for the betrothal feast of ROBIN and MARIAN. Some of ROBIN HOOD'S men are arriving at the doors. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF runs forward to greet them.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Come in, my scraps of Lincoln green ; come in,
My slips of greenwood. You're much wanted here !
Head, heart and eyes, we are all pent up in walls
Of stone. Nothing but walls on every side,
And not a rose to break them,—big blind walls,
Neat, smooth, stone walls. Come in, my ragged robins.
Come in, my jolly minions of the moon,
My straggling hazel-boughs ! Hey, bully Friar,

Roll in, my knotted oak. Ho, little Much,
Hop in, my sweet green linnet. Come, my cushats,
Larks, yellow-hammers, fern-owls, hawks, and thrushes,
Come in, my Dian's foresters, and drown us
With may, with blossoming may.

Fitzwalter. Out, Shadow-of-a-Leaf !
Welcome, welcome, good friends of Huntingdon,
Or Robin Hood, by whatsoever name
You best may love him.

[*Cries*].

Robin ! Robin ! Robin !

Enter ROBIN HOOD.

Fitzwalter [*greeting him*]. Robin. So be it. Myself I
am right glad
To call him at this bright betrothal feast
My son.

[*Lays a hand on* ROBIN'S *shoulder*.]

Robin. Where's Marian ?

Fitzwalter. Marian. Ah, that's all
You think of, boy. But I must say a word
To all of you before she comes. No need
To look so startled. It is no secret here.
All of you know how perilous a road
My Marian must ride if Huntingdon
Tramples the forest laws beneath his heel,
And, in the thin disguise of Robin Hood,
Succours the Saxon outlaws ; makes his house
A refuge for them . . .

[*The SHERIFF and two of his men appear in
the great doorway out of sight of the guests.*]

Sheriff. Not yet. Keep back a little.
One of you go—see that the guards are set.
He must not slip us.

Fitzwalter. I say that he must doff
His green disguise of Robin Hood for ever,
And wear his natural coat of Huntingdon.

Robin. Ah, which is the disguise? We are all so
swathed
In our habitual thoughts, that few men know
Their souls or bodies from their winding-sheets ;
And that old sexton, Custom, all day long
Shovels the dirt upon us where we lie
Buried alive, and dreaming that we stand
Upright and royal. The Conqueror desired
A broader hunting-ground. A thousand huts
Burned for it. Then we made our forest laws,
And sent their wreckage groping through the dark,
Lopped hands, blind faces. Is there a wild beast
That would so wrong his kind? How can I help
Fighting against it all?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Ah, gossips, if the Conqueror had
but burned
Everything with four walls,—hut, castle, palace,
And turned the whole wide world into a forest,
Drenched us with may, we might be happy then.
With sweet blue wood-smoke curling through the boughs,
And just a pigeon's flap to break the silence,
And ferns, of course, there's much to make men happy
Well, well, the forest conquers at the last.
I saw a thistle in the castle courtyard,
A purple thistle breaking through the pavement,
Yesterday ; and it's wonderful how soon
Some creepers pick these old grey walls to pieces.

These nunneries and these monasteries now,
They don't spring up like flowers ; so I suppose
Old mother Nature wins the race at last.

Fitzwalter. Robin, my heart is with you, but I know
A hundred ages will not change this earth.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Not if the sun be blown out like a
candle ?
Far stranger things have happened.

Fitzwalter. Silence, fool.
Moreover, Robin, where you have found the gold
You have already scattered with both hands
Heaven knows.

Friar Tuck. O, by the holy nightingales
Of Sherwood, so do I ?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Ah, Friar Tuck,
Cut me a silver penny out of the moon
Next time you're there.

Fitzwalter. You must be patient, Robin.
When Lion-heart comes home, he will not brook
This blot upon our chivalry. But Prince John
Is dangerous to a heart like yours. Beware
Of rousing him. Meanwhile, your troth holds good ;
But till the King comes home from the Crusade
You must not claim your bride.

Robin. So be it, then . . .
When the great King comes home from the Crusade.

Fitzwalter. Meanwhile, for Marian's sake, and mine, I
pray
Do nothing rash.

Enter WIDOW SCARLET. She goes up to ROBIN HOOD, and clutches him by the sleeve.

Widow Scarlet. They told me you were here.

Robin. Come, mother, what's the trouble ?

Widow Scarlet. Sir, my son,
Will Scarlet, lies in gaol at Nottingham,
For killing deer in Sherwood. Sir, they'll hang him.
He only wanted food for him and me.
I'll pray for you, I'll . . .

[She kneels.

Robin Hood [*to FITZWALTER, as ROBIN gently raises WIDOW SCARLET to her feet*]. Sir, has not the
King
Come home from the Crusade ? Does not your heart
Fling open wide its gates to welcome him ?

Fitzwalter. This is no time for riddles.

Robin. What shall I do, sir ?

Fitzwalter. I will say nothing more.
Do what seems best.

Robin. I hope there is a way.
I know Will Scarlet, mother. Trustier heart
There never beat beneath a leather jerkin.
He loved the forest, and the forest loves him ;
And if the lads that wear its living green
Should happen to break out and save Will Scarlet,
Why, that's a matter none shall answer for
To prince or king, but you and Robin Hood,

Enter the SHERIFF, with two of his men.

Sheriff. In the King's name! This writ proclaimeth the Earl of Huntingdon. Forasmuch as he hath aided the king's enemies, and taken up arms against the king's men in defiance of the forest laws, be it known to all men that the said Earl of Huntingdon is hereby deprived of his earldom, and declared from this time forth to be an outlaw.

Robin. That's well.

[He laughs.]

There is only one mistake. He said
The king's men.

Fitzwalter. Ah, but I foresaw, foresaw!

Friar Tuck [muttering angrily]. Out with 'em! Out
with 'em, neck and crop, say I.

[He brandishes his quarter-staff. Others drawing hunting-knives, make a threatening movement towards the SHERIFF and his men, who retreat through the door.]

Robin [intervening]. Don't harm the king's men!

Fitzwalter. I foretold, foretold!

Widow Scarlet [clutching at SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF]. But
who will save my son now? Who will save
him?

Robin Hood [taking her hand]. Why, Widow Scarlet,
this is only a dream.

This poor fantastic strutting show of law,
And you shall wake with us in Sherwood forest

And find Will Scarlet in your arms again.
Come, cheerly, cheerly, we shall overcome
All this. Hark !

*[A bugle sounds in the distance. There is a
scuffle in the doorway, and LITTLE JOHN
bursts in. His head is bleeding.]*

Little John. Robin, quickly ! Come away !
They are setting a trap for thee, drawing their lines
All round the castle. In half an hour, I swear,
Wert thou a fox, thoud'st never slip between 'em.

[Another bugle sounds from another direction.]

That's number two ! Two sides cut off already.
When the third sounds, they'll have thee, sure as death.
Prince John is there with five-score men.

Robin. Prince John !

Little John. Oh, ay, Prince John ; and if these ears
heard right

[He mutters to FITZWALTER.]

Look well, my lord, to Mistress Marian.

Fitzwalter. Robin, this is thy rashness. I warned thee,
boy.

Prince John ! Nay, that's too perilous a jest
For even a prince to play with me

Robin. Let me have
One word with Marian.

Little John. It would be your last
On earth.

Fitzwalter. Come, Robin, quickly. Are you mad?
You'll bring us all to ruin.

[He opens a little door in the wall.]

The secret passage.
This brings you out by Much the Miller's wheel,
Thro' an otter's burrow in the river bank.
If you're in danger, slip into the stream
And let it carry you down into the heart
Of Sherwood. Come now, quickly. You must go.

Robin. The old cave, lads, in Sherwood.

Fitzwalter.

Quickly, go.

*[He pushes ROBIN and LITTLE JOHN into the
opening, and shuts the door.]*

Oh, I shall pay for this, this cursed folly!

Enter MARIAN from a door on the right above the banquetting hall. She pauses, pale and frightened, on the broad steps leading down.

Marian. Father, where's Robin?

Fitzwalter.
Until I called you.

Child, I bade you stay

Marian. Something frightened me!
Father, where's Robin? Where's Robin?

Fitzwalter.

Hush, Marian, hark!

[All stand listening.]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [*stealing to the foot of the stairs and whispering to LADY MARIAN*]. Lady, they're all so silent now. I'll tell you.

I had a dream last night—there was a man
That bled to death, because of four grey walls
And a black-hooded nun.

Fitzwalter [*angrily*]. Hist, Shadow-of-a-Leaf !

[*The third bugle sounds. There is a clamour at the doors.*]

Enter PRINCE JOHN and his retainers.

John [*mockingly*]. Now this is fortunate ! I come in time

To see—Oh, what a picture ! Lady Marian,
Forgive me—coming suddenly out of the dark
And seeing you there, robed in that dazzling white
Above these verdant gentlemen, I feel
Like one that greets the gracious evening star
Thro' a gap in a great wood.

Is aught amiss ?

Why are you all so silent ? Ah, my good,
My brave Fitzwalter, I most fervently
Trust I am not inopportune.

Fitzwalter.

My lord,

I am glad that you can jest. I am sadly grieved
And sorely disappointed in that youth
Who has incurred your own displeasure.

John.

Ah ?

Your future son-in-law ?

Fitzwalter. Never on earth !
He is outlawed !—

Marian. Outlawed !

Fitzwalter. He shall never enter
These doors again.

John. And what says Lady Marian ?

Marian. I am not so unworthy.

Fitzwalter. Unworthy ?

Marian. Yes.
How could we so desert the bravest man
In England since the days of Hereward.
You know why he is outlawed !

Fitzwalter [*to* PRINCE JOHN]. Sir, she speaks
As the spoilt child of her old father's dotage.
Give her no heed. She shall not meet with him
On earth again and, till she promise this,
She'll sun herself within the castle garden
And never cross the draw-bridge.

Marian. Then I'll swim
The moat !

Friar Tuck. Ha ! Ha ! well spoken.

Marian. Oh, you forget,
Father, you quite forget there is a King ;
And, when the King comes home from the Crusade,
Will you forget Prince John and change once more ?

[*Murmurs of assent from the foresters.*]

John. Enough of this.
Though I be prince, I am vicegerent too !
Fitzwalter, I would have some private talk
With you and Lady Marian. Bid your guests
Remove a little.

Fitzwalter. I'll lead them all within.
And let them make what cheer they may. Come, friends.

[He leads them up the stairs to the inner room.]

My lord, I shall return immediately.

[Exeunt FITZWALTER and the guests]

John. Marian !

Marian. My lord !

John [*drawing close to her*]. I have come to urge a plea
On your behalf as well as on my own.
Listen, you may not know it—I must tell you.
I have watched your beauty growing like a flower,
With—why should I not say it—worship ; yes,
Marian, I will not hide it.

Marian. Sir, I am plighted
Not to a prince, but to an outlawed man.

John. Listen to me !

Is not your father poor ?
I'd make him rich ! Is not your lover outlawed ?
I'd save him from the certain death that waits him.
You say the forest laws afflict your soul
And his—you say you'd die for their repeal.
I will repeal them. All the churls in England
Shall bless your name and mix it in their prayers
With heaven itself.

Marian.

The price ?

John. You call it that,
To let me lay the world before your feet.

Marian. D'you think that bartering my soul will
help
To save another ? All that is good in them,
All you have left, all you have not destroyed,
Cries out against you.

John. And with such lips as yours
You take to preaching ! I was a fool to worry
Your soul with reason. With hair like yours—it's
hopeless !
But Marian—you shall hear me.

[*He seizes her in his arms.*]

Yès, by God,
Marian, you shall.

Enter FITZWALTER above.

Marian [*wresting herself free*]. You should not live !
Were I a man, and a dagger in my hand,
You should not live.

John. Come, now, that's very wicked.
See how these murderous words affright your father.
My lord Fitzwalter, there is no need to look
So ghastly. A month or two at our gay court
Would make your girl forget that outlawed fool
Huntingdon. I have been trying to show her
Our latest galliard, hoping to persuade her.
And, in return, she flies at me—a tigress.

Fitzwalter. You are very good, sir. But she is needed
here
At home.

John. I'll not be trifled with. I hold
The hand of friendship out, and you evade it.
The moment I am gone, back comes your outlaw.
So be it. I'll take her, as hostage for yourself,
Back to the court with me.

Fitzwalter. My lord, you jest !
I have sworn to you.

John. No more ! If you be loyal,
What cause have you to fear ?

Fitzwalter. My lord, I'll give
A hundred other pledges ; but not this

John. God's body, will you dictate your terms to me ?
I say that she shall come back to the court
This very night ! Where are my men ?

[*Enter JOHN's retainers.*

Escort

This lady back with us.

Fitzwalter. Back, there, keep back.
Prince or no prince, I say she shall not go !

[*He draws his sword.*

John. So here's an end of fawning, here's the truth,
My old white-bearded hypocrite. Come, take her,
Waste no more time. Let not the old fool daunt you
With that great skewer.

Fitzwalter [as JOHN's men advance]. By God, since you will have it,
Since you will drive me to my last resort,
Break down my walls, and hound me to the forest,
Ho, help! A Robin Hood! A Robin Hood!

[*There is a clamour from the upper room. The doors are flung open and the foresters appear at the head of the steps.*]

Friar Tuck [coming down into the hall and brandishing his quarter-staff]. Who calls on Robin Hood?
His men are here
To answer.

Fitzwalter. Drive these villains out of my gates.

Friar Tuck [to PRINCE JOHN]. Sir, I perceive you are a man of wisdom,
So let me counsel you. There's not a lad
Up yonder, but at four-score yards can shoot
A swallow on the wing. Now shall I give
The word? Ready, my lads!

[*The foresters make ready to shoot. JOHN hesitates for a moment.*]

John. Farewell, then! I have five-score men at hand!
And they shall be but lightning to the hell
Of my revenge, *Fitzwalter*. From this night's work
Shall God Himself not save you.

[*Exeunt JOHN and his men.*]

Friar Tuck [as they go out]. I have confessed him.
Now, shall I bid 'em shoot?

Fitzwalter. No ; or the King
Himself will come against me. Follow them out.
Drive them out of my gates. Then raise the drawbridge
And let none cross.

[*Exeunt the foresters and FITZWALTER.*
SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF remains alone with
MARIAN.

Marian [*flinging herself down on a couch and burying
her head in her arms*]. O, Robin.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [*sitting at her feet. The lights grow
dim*]. Ah, well, the prince
Promised to break the walls down. Don't you think
These villains are a kind of ploughshare, lady,
And where they plough, who knows what wheat may
spring !
Now, Lady Marian, let me tell my dream.
There was a forester that bled to death
Because of four grey walls and a black nun
Whose face I could not see ; a nun that said
No prayers, and had not taken any vows.
I am but your fool. I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Dancing before the wild winds of the future,
Yet they come shivering through my tattered wits
Long ere your wisdom feels them. My poor brain
Is like a harp hung in a willow-tree
Whispering beware of that black-hooded nun.

Marian. A nun ? What riddle is this, dear Shadow-
of-a-Leaf ?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. The lights are burning low. Do
you not feel
A cold breath on your face ?

Marian. Open that shutter.
Look out and tell me what is happening.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [*flinging back the shutter*]. Look !
Look, gossip, how the moon comes dancing in.
Ah, they have driven Prince John across the drawbridge,
They are raising it now.

[*SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF turns from the window
and stands pointing to the door.*]

Look ! Look !

Marian [*starting up with a cry of fear*]. Ah !

[*The tall figure of a nun stands in the stream
of moonlight, and throwing back her hood
reveals the face of ELINOR.*]

Elinor. Lady Marian,
Tell me quickly, where is Huntingdon ?

Marian. How can I tell the sister of Prince John ?

Elinor. I see you wish I had stayed at home in Spain.
I am not disguised for a jest. Quick.

Where is Robin ?

Marian. Escaped, I hope.

Elinor. Not here ?

Marian. No.

Elinor. Lady Marian,
I am here to save you both. By dawn, Prince John
Will have five hundred men upon his track.
I know their plans as surely as you know
Your lover's hiding-place. You must guide me there

And let me speak with him. Here on this cross,
My father's dying gift, I swear to you
I wish to save him.

Enter FITZWALTER.

Ah, my Lord Fitzwalter.

Fitzwalter. Princess ! O madam, madam, I am driven
Beyond myself. This girl, this foolish girl
Has brought us all to ruin.

Elinor. I am on your side.
It has not come to that. All will be well.
But I must speak a word with Robin Hood :
Your daughter knows his hiding-place.

Fitzwalter. In Sherwood ?

Elinor. O, trust them both for that ; and she must
guide me.

Fitzwalter. But—Marian !

Elinor. She'll be safer far with Robin
Than loitering here until your roof-tree burns.
Go, child, make ready, and swiftly, for you know
Your Robin may be wounded. I have some skill
In wounds.

Marian [*going up to her father*]. I'll go to him, father,
if you'll let me.

Elinor. Go, child, first do my bidding. He'll consent
When you return.

[*Exit* MARIAN.]

My dear good friend Fitzwalter,
Trust me, I have some power with Huntingdon.

All shall be as you wish. I'll let her guide me,
But—as for her—she shall not even see him
Unless you wish.

Fitzwalter. It is dark here.
Let us within. And, Madam, you'll persuade
Prince John ?

Elinor [*as they go up the steps*]. I swear by this,
This holy cross, my father's dying gift !

Fitzwalter. It's very sure he'd burn the castle down.

[*Exeunt.*]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [*coming out into the moonlight and
staring up after them*]. The nun ! The nun ! They'll
whip me if I speak,
For I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the Fool.

ACT II.

SCENE I.—SHERWOOD FOREST.

An open glade, showing on the right the mouth of the outlaw's cave. It is about sunset. The giant figure of LITTLE JOHN comes out of the cave, singing.

Little John [sings].

When Spring comes back to England
And crowns her brows with may,
Round the merry moonlit world
She goes the greenwood way.

[He stops and calls in stentorian tones.]

Much ! Much ! Much ! Where has he vanished now,
Where has that monstrous giant the miller's son
Hidden himself ?

Enter MUCH, a dwarf-like figure, carrying a large bundle of ferns.

Much. Hush, hush, child, here I am !
And here's our fairy feather-beds, ha ! ha !
Come, praise me, praise me, for a thoughtful parent.
There's nothing makes a better bed than ferns
Either for sleeping sound or rosy dreams.

Little John. Take care the fern-seed that the fairies use
Get not among thy yellow locks, my Titan,
Or thou'lt wake up invisible. There's none
Too much of Much already.

Much [*looking up at him impudently*]. It would take
Our big barn full of fern-seed, I misdoubt
To make thee walk invisible, Little John.

Little John. Invisible? Ay, but what would Jenny say
To such a ghostly midge as thou would'st be
Sipping invisibly at her cherry lips.

Much. Ah, that's a teaser. My poor Jenny takes
The smallness of her Much sorely to heart!
And though I often tell her half a loaf
(Ground in our mill) is better than no bread,
She weeps, poor thing, that an impartial heaven
Bestows on her so small a crumb of bliss
As me! You'd scarce believe, now, half the nostrums,
Possets and strangely nasty herbal juices
That girl has made me gulp, in the vain hope
That I, the frog, should swell to an ox like thee.
I tell her it's all in vain, and she still cheats
Her fancy and swears I've grown well-nigh three feet
Already. O Lord, she's desperate. She'll advance
Right inward to the sources of creation,
She'll take the reins of the world in hand. She'll stop
The sun like Joshua, turn the moon to blood,
And if I have to swallow half the herbs
In Sherwood, I shall stalk a giant yet,
Shoulder to shoulder with thee, Little John,
And crack thy head at quarter-staff. But don't,
Don't joke about it. 'Tis a serious matter.

Little John. Into the cave, then, with thy feather-bed.
Old Much is waiting for thee there to make

A table of green turfs for Robin Hood.
We shall have guests anon.

Much [going towards the cave]. O, my poor father.
Now, there's a sad thing, too. He's so ashamed
Of his descendants. Why for some nine years
He shut his eyes whenever he looked at me ;
And I have seen him on the village green
Pretend to a stranger, once, who badgered him
With curious questions, that I was the son
Of poor old Gaffer Bramble, the lame sexton.
That very same afternoon, up comes old Bramble,
White hair ablaze and big red wagging nose
All shaking with the palsy ; bangs our door
Clean off its hinges with his crab-tree crutch,
And stands there—framed—against the sunset sky !
He stretches out one quivering forefinger
At father, like the great Destroying Angel
In the stained window : straight, the milk boiled over,
The cat ran, baby squalled and mother screeched.
Old Bramble asks my father—what—what—what
He meant—he meant—he meant ! You should have seen
My father's hopeless face ! Lord, how he blushed !
'Tis a hard business when a parent looks
Askance upon his offspring.

[Exit into the cave.]

Little John.
Here's Robin.

Skip, you chatterer !

Enter ROBIN HOOD.

Robin, where hast thou been ?
What's this ?

This was a cloth-yard shaft that tore thy coat !

Everything he has ever said to you
He has said to me. But that's all over now.
You have brought me here, and I can save his life ;
But, if you are wise, you'll turn here, and go home.

Marian. What do you mean ?

Elinor. You cannot wish to share
An outlaw's cave, till all your youth is wasted
And he grows tired of you. You must return
Back through the forest, and leave the rest to me.

Marian. You have lied to me. How can I tell what
lies
You may tell Robin. You have tried to turn
My heart against him.

Elinor [*holding out a letter*]. Read here what he wrote
To me, to me, not four brief years ago.

Marian. Four years ago perhaps you had the power
To fool him ; but I do not read his letters.

[*She tears up the letter.*]

Elinor. You have destroyed it !

Marian. It was never yours.
You stole it out of a boy's heart.

Elinor [*drawing a dagger*]. You have destroyed it.
See if your delicate skin can turn the edge
Of this—this—

[*She is about to strike when SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF leaps out of the forest and seizes her arm.*]

(*ROBIN comes out into the glade.*)

Elinor. Robin, I've come to you, trampled on my
pride
To save you in your own despite.

Robin. I have heard
And seen enough. My men will guide you back.
Marian, you will be safer here in Sherwood.

Elinor. And you've no other word for me than this
Come, trust me, Robin. I can wind Prince John
Around my little finger.

Robin. You'd cheat him too ?

Elinor. Robin, I never forget. I never forgive.

Robin. Are you so proud of that ?

Elinor. And so you fling
My gift into my face to please this gypsy,
Your paramour. Well—God give her joy, say I,
And speed the wedding, by your fat hedge-priest
Under an altar of hawthorn, with a choir
Of sparrows, and a spray of cuckoo-spit
For holy water ! Oh, the modest chime !
Bells in a fox-glove belfry, while she dons
Her veil of evening mist. A blade of grass
Will serve for a marriage ring ; a band of thieves
In Lincoln green to witness the sweet banns ;
A glow-worm for a nuptial taper ; a bed
Of rose-leaves, and wild thyme and wood-doves' down.
Quick ! Draw the bridal curtains—three tall ferns—
Across the cave-mouth, lest a star should peep
And make the wild-rose leap into her face !
Pish ! A sweet maid !

Robin. My men shall guide you back. [Calls].
Two of you there !

[Enter several of the outlaws.

This lady needs a guide
Back through the forest.

Ellnor. You, at least, have chosen
A road on which no guide can save you now.

[Exit, with the foresters.

Marian. O, Robin, how the clouds begin to gather.

Robin [embracing her]. *Marian*, my *Marian*, you were
worlds away
Only an hour ago. I could not dream
My *Dian* would come wandering through the fern.

Marian. But you were hidden in the heart of Sherwood,
And yet I found you, Robin.

Enter FRIAR TUCK, with WIDOW SCARLET
and JENNY.

Jenny. Ah, Friar Tuck !

Marian. My faithful Jenny.

Robin. And Widow Scarlet, too !

Friar Tuck. Oh, children, children, this is thirsty
weather !
The heads I have cracked, the ribs I have thwacked,
the bones
I have bashed with my good quarter-staff to bring
These bits of woman-kind through Sherwood Forest.

Robin. What, was there scuffling, friar ?

Friar Tuck. Some two or three
Pounced on us.

Jenny. Two or three ! I'll swear for a score,
Mistress, great greasy scullions !

Friar Tuck. They've gone home
Well chastened by the Church. This pastoral staff,
Mine oaken *pax vobiscum*, you should have heard it,
Cracking their silly skulls like addled eggs,
Pax, pax, pax, pax !

Jenny. The cudgel said the *pax*,
And after every *pax* the friar grunted
Vobiscum, like responses in a choir.
Mistress, I'm trembling still. Great greasy turnspits.

Robin. Ah, Jenny Wren, you've Much to comfort
you ;
And you can chirp. But what ails Widow Scarlet ?

Widow Scarlet. O, sir, to-morrow is the day they've
named
For hanging my poor boy.

Robin. They have named the day
For setting of him free, then, my good dame.
To-morrow, Marian, you must guard our cave
With Jenny and Widow Scarlet here alone.
But you'll be safe enough. We go disguised
As pedlars, beggars, or old blind ballad-singers.
I've a green patch to wear on my left eye
Big as an oak-leaf. We shall join the crowd
Around the gallows ; then, when the bugle rings,
The Sheriff will find that, somehow, Sherwood Forest

Is thrusting its branches up between his feet.
Off go the cloaks and all is Lincoln green.
Oh, we break up like nature through the laws
Of that dark world. Fear nothing, Widow Scarlet.
Go, Jenny, take her in and make her cosy.
Your Much will grow three feet at least with joy
To welcome you.

[JENNY and WIDOW SCARLET go towards the
cave. The outlaws begin to assemble in
the glade.

Robin. Now, Marian, you're in time
To hear our forest ritual. When the moon
Rises above that sycamore, Friar Tuck
Gives us our golden rules.

[The moon brightens. LITTLE JOHN blows a
soft bugle-call.

Friar Tuck. First, shall no man
Presume to call our Robin Hood or any
By name of earl, lord, baron, knight, or squire,
But simply by their names as men and brothers :
Second, that Lady Marian while she shares
Our outlaw life in Sherwood shall be called
Simply Maid Marian. Thirdly, we that follow
Robin, shall never in thought or word or deed
Do harm to maid or wife or widow. Fourthly,
All that ye meet in Sherwood ye shall bring
To dine with Robin. Fifthly, ye shall defend
All that are trampled under by the world,
And spread the forest arms of Sherwood round them.

Robin. So, if it be no dream, we shall at last
Hasten the kingdom of God's will on earth.
There shall be no more talk of rich and poor,

Norman and Saxon. We shall be one people,
One family, clustering all with happy hands
And faces round that glowing hearth, the sun.
Now let the bugle sound a golden challenge
To the great world ! Greenleaf, a forest call !

[REYNOLD GREENLEAF *blows a resounding call.*

Now let the guards be set ; and then, to sleep.
To-morrow there'll be work enough for all.
The hut for Jenny and Maid Marian.

Much. Come, Jenny, we must prepare the hut
For Mistress Marian. Here's a bundle of ferns !

[*They go into the hut. The light is growing dimmer.*

Little John. And here's a rich cramoisy cloak, a baron

[*Handing them in at the door.*

Dropt, as he fled one night from Robin Hood ;
And here's a green, and here's a midnight blue,
All soft as down. But wait, I'll bring you more.

[*Two of the outlaws appear at the door with deer-skins. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF stands behind them with a great bunch of flowers and ferns.*

First Outlaw. Here's fawn-skins, milder than a maiden's
cheek.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Oh, you should talk in rhyme !
The world should sing
Just for this once in tune, if Love were king !

Second Outlaw. Here's deer-skins, for a carpet, warm
and sleek.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. I knew you would! Ha! ha!
Now look at what I bring!

*[He throws flowers into the hut, spray by spray,
speaking in a kind of ecstasy.]*

Here's lavender and love and sweet wild thyme,
And dreams and blue-bells that the fairies chime,
Here's meadow-sweet and moonlight, bound in posies,
With ragged robin, traveller's joy and roses,
And here—just three leaves from a weeping willow;
And here—that's best—deep poppies for your pillow.

Much. And here's a pillow that I made myself,
Stuffed with dry rose-leaves and grey pigeon's down,
The softest thing on earth except my heart!

Shadow-of-a-Leaf *[going aside and throwing himself
down among the ferns to watch]*. Just three sweet
breaths and then the song is flown!

*[MUCH looks at him for a moment with a puzzled
face, then turns to the hut again.]*

Much. Jenny, here, take it—though I'm fond of
comforts,
Take it and give it to Maid Marian.

Jenny. Why, Much, 'tis bigger than thyself.

Much. *Hush, child.*
I meant to use it lengthways. 'Twould have made

A feather-bed complete for your poor Much.

[The outlaws all go into the cave. MARIAN goes into the hut. The door is shut. ROBIN goes to the mouth of the cave and throws himself down on a couch of deer-skins.]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [*rising to his knees*]. O, Whisper of Ferns, what word of the Shining Glen ?

Fern-Whisper [*rising out of the bracken*]. *Shadow-of-a-Leaf*, darkness is on the way.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. O, Whisper of Thorns, what word of the light beyond it ?

Thorn-Whisper [*rising out of the bracken*]. Maid Marian, and her outlawed Robin Hood
Are in dire peril ; yet we may not break
Our vows of silence. Nor could they understand
If we did break them. When have mortal ears
Heard the deep music that our lonely forests
Have murmured through the ages ?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. But I am free.
The very Love that crazed me gave me power
To come and go at will ; and I am mortal,
So I can break my vows.

Thorn-Whisper. Only on pain
Of what on earth you poor dark mortals call
Death.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Death ?

Thorn-Whisper. Never to pass our happy gates
Again, but die like mortals. What that means
The immortals never knew—until—

Fern-Whisper.
Let him remember.

Ah, hush,

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. If I could save them ! Death !
I am only *Shadow-of-a-Leaf*.

Thorn-Whisper. There is a King
Beyond the seas. If he came home in time,
They might be saved. We glen-folk only catch
Stray gleams, wandering shadows of things to come.

Fern-Whisper. Oh, if the King came home from the
Crusade.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Why will he fight for graves beyond
the sea ?

Thorn-Whisper. Word reached us on a kestrel's wings
at dusk
That *Lion-Heart*, while wandering home through Europe
In jet-black armour, like an unknown knight,
Was captured by a wicked prince and thrust,
Despite the cross that burned upon his shield,
Into a dungeon. Only a song can break
Those prison-bars.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. A song ?

Thorn-Whisper. There is a minstrel
That loves his King. If he should roam the world
Singing, until from that dark tower he hears
The King reply, the King would be set free.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Only a song, only a minstrel ?

Fern-Whisper. Ay ;
And *Blondel* is his name.

[A long low sound of wailing is heard in the
distance.]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. That's not the voice
Of pine-trees, or of elms. . . .

Thorn-Whisper. It was the sound
Of the world's weeping over its myriad graves,
The sound of the world's heart breaking in the night
Where mortals live and die.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. To be shut out
For ever, in that world. O, Whisper of Ferns,
I am only Shadow-of-a-Leaf. . . .

Fern-Whisper. Is there no hope
But this? No hope for Robin and Marian?

Thorn-Whisper. If the great King comes home from
the Crusade
In time. If not—there is another King
Beyond the world, they say. . . .

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Death, that dark death!
To leave the sunlight and the flowers for ever.
I'll wait—perhaps the great King will come home.
If not—listen!—a wandering minstrel's voice!

Fern-Whisper. Who is drawing hither? Listen!

Thorn-Whisper. Listen!

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Listen!

[Song heard approaching thro' the wood.]

Knight on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
"Onward," I heard him say,
"Love, to thy side!"

“Nay,” sang a bird above ;
“Stay, for I see
Death in the mask of love,
Waiting for thee.”

*[The song breaks off. Enter a minstrel,
leading a great white steed. He pauses,
as though dazzled by the moonlight.]*

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Minstrel, art thou, too, free of the
Shining Glen ?

Where wouldst thou ride ? What is thy name ?

Minstrel. My name
Is Blondel.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Blondel !

Fern-Whisper. Blondel !

Minstrel. And I ride
Through all the world to seek and find my King !

*[He passes through the glade and goes into the
woods beyond, continuing his song, which
dies away in the distance.]*

(SONG.)

“Death ? What is death ? ” he cried.

“I must ride on,
On to my true love’s side,
Up to her throne ! ”

ACT III.

SCENE I.—MAY-DAY. AN OPEN PLACE
(NEAR NOTTINGHAM).

A crowd of rustics and townsfolk assembling to see the execution of WILL SCARLET.

First Rustic. A sad May-day ! Where yonder gallows
glowers,
We should have raised the May-pole.

Second Rustic. Ay, no songs,
No dancing on the green.

*Enter ROBIN HOOD, disguised as an old beggar,
with a green patch on one eye.*

Robin. Is this the place,
Masters, where they're a-goin' to hang Will Scarlet ?

First Rustic. Ay, father, more's the pity.

Robin. Eh, don't ye think
There may be scuffling, masters ?

First Rustic. There's many here would swing a cudgel
and help
To trip the Sheriff up. If Robin Hood
Were only here !

Third Rustic. They say Prince John is out
This very day, scouring thro' Sherwood Forest,
In quest of Lady Marian !

Robin [*sharply*]. You heard that ?

Third Rustic. Ay, for they say she's flown to Sherwood
Forest.

Second Rustic. She'd best beware then ; for I saw
Prince John !
With these same eyes I saw him riding out
To Sherwood, not an hour ago.

Robin. You saw him ?

Second Rustic. Ay, and he only took three men-at-
arms.

First Rustic. Three men-at-arms ! Why, then, he
must ha' known
That Robin's men would all be busy here !
I think there'll be some scuffling after all.

Robin. Ay, tell 'em so—go, spread it thro' the crowd !

[*He mutters to himself.*]

He'd take some time to find her, but 'fore God
We must be quick ; 'fore God we must be quick !

Second Rustic. Why, father, one would never think
to see thee
Thou had'st so sound a heart.

First Rustic. Ah, here they come !
The Sheriff and his men ; and, in the midst,
There's poor Will Scarlet bound.

The Crowd. Ah, here they come !

First Rustic. There, there he is. His face is white ;
but, Lord,
He takes it bravely.

Second Rustic. He's a brave man is Will.

Sheriff. Back with the crowd there, guards ; delay
no time !

Some Women in the Crowd. Ah, ah, poor lad !

Robin [*eagerly*]. What are they doing now ?
I cannot see !

First Rustic. The Sheriff's angered now !

Second Rustic. Ay, for they say the hangman has not
come.

Third Rustic. The Sheriff says he will not be delayed.
But who will do the hanging then ?

Robin. I have a thought ; make way ; let me bespeak
The Sheriff !

Rustics. How now, father, what's to do ?

Robin. Make way, I tell you. I'm the man they want !

Sheriff. What's this ?

Robin. Good master Sheriff, I've a grudge
Against Will Scarlet. Let me have the task
Of sending him to heaven !

Crowd. Ah-h-h, the old devil !

Sheriff. Come on, then, and be brief !

Robin. I'm not a hangman ;
But I can cleave your thinnest hazel wand
At sixty yards.

Sheriff. Shoot, then, and make an end.
Make way, there, clear the way !

*[An opening is made in the crowd. ROBIN
stands in the gap.]*

Crowd. Ah-h-h, the old devil !

Robin. I'll shoot him one on either side, just graze
him,
To show you how I love him ; then the third
Slick in his heart.

[He shoots. A murmur goes up from the crowd.]

Sheriff [angrily]. Take care ! You've cut the cord
That bound him on that side !

Robin. Then here's the second.
I will be careful.

[He takes a steady aim.]

A Rustic to his Neighbours. I'faith, lads, he can shoot.

*[ROBIN shoots. A louder murmur goes up
from the crowd.]*

Sheriff. You have cut the rope again !

A Cry. He has cut him free !

Robin. All right ! All right ! It's only to tease the
dog.
Here's for the third now.

*[He aims and shoots quickly. There is a loud
cry of a wounded man ; then a shout from
the crowd.]*

First Rustic.

What has he done ?

Second Rustic.

He has killed

One of the Sheriff's men !

Sheriff.

There's treachery here !

I'll cleave the first man's heart that moves !

Robin.

Will Scarlet,

Pick up that dead man's dagger !

Sheriff.

Treachery ! Help !

Down with the villain !

Robin [throws off his beggar's crouch and hurls the SHERIFF and several of his men back amongst the crowd. His cloak drops off.] Sherwood ! A merry Sherwood !

Rustics. Ah, ha ! The Lincoln' green ! A Robin Hood !

[A bugle rings out. Immediately some of the yokels throw off their disguise, and the Lincoln green appears as by magic amongst the crowd. The guards are rushed and hustled by them. ROBIN and several of his men make a ring round WILL SCARLET.]

Sheriff. It is the outlawed Earl of Huntingdon :
There is a great reward upon his head.
Down with him !

[The SHERIFF'S men make a rush at the little band. A knight in jet-black armour, with a red-cross shield, suddenly appears and forces his way through the mob, sword in hand.]

Knight. What, so many against so few !
Back, you damned wolves. Now, foresters, follow me,
Up, cudgels, for our Saint George, and drive them all
Home to the devil !

*[The foresters make a rush with him, and the
SHERIFF and his men take to flight.]*

Robin. Now back to Sherwood, swiftly !

*[He sees the KNIGHT in armour standing by his
horse.]*

Your pardon, sir ; our debt to you is great,
Too great almost for thanks ; but if you be
Bound by the vows of chivalry, I pray you
Lend me your charger ; and my men will bring you
To my poor home in Sherwood. There you'll find
A most abundant gratitude.

Knight. Your name ?

Robin. Was Huntingdon ; but now is Robin Hood.

Knight. If I refuse ?

Robin. Then, sir, I must perforce
Take him. I am an outlaw, but the law
Of manhood still constrains me. It is a matter
Of life or death.

Knight. Take him and God be with you.
I'll follow you to Sherwood with your men.

*[ROBIN seizes the horse, leaps to the saddle, and
gallops away.]*

John. So here's my dainty tigress in her den.

[*At a sign from MARIAN, JENNY goes quickly inside the cave.*]

That's well ! Dismiss your maid !
Warman, remove a little.

(*His man retires.*)

I see you think
A little better of me. Out in the wood
There waits a palfrey for you, and the stirrup
Longs, as I long, to clasp your dainty foot.

[*He draws nearer.*]

Marian. Wait—I must think, must think.

John. Give me your hand !
Why do you shrink from me ? If you could know
The fire that burns me night and day.

Marian. You are mad !

John. Ay, mad for you.

[*JENNY comes out of the cave and hands
MARIAN a bow. She leaps back and aims
it at JOHN.*]

Marian. Back, you wild beast, or by the heaven
above us,
I'll kill you ! Now, don't doubt me. I can shoot
Truly as any forester. I swear,
Prince or no prince, king or no king, I'll kill you
If you should stir one step from where you stand.

John. I was beside myself, was carried away.
I cannot help my love for—

Marian. I'll not hear
Another sickening word : throw down your arms,
That dagger at your side.

John. Marian, I swear—

Marian. You see that rusty stain
Upon the silver birch down yonder ? Watch.

[She shoots. Then swiftly aims at him again.]

Now, throw your weapon down.

*[He pulls out the dagger and throws it down,
with a shrug of his shoulders. One of his
men steals up behind.]* MARIAN.

Jenny. There's one behind you ! Look !

*[The man springs forward and seizes MARIAN'S
arms.]*

John *[coming forward and taking hold of her also].* So,
my sweet tigress,
You're trapped then, are you ? Well, we'll waste no
time !
We'll talk this over when we reach the castle.
Keep off the maid, there, Warman ; I can manage
This turbulent beauty. Ah, by God, you shall
Come ! Ah ! God's blood, what's this ?

*[MARIAN has succeeded in drawing her dagger
and slightly wounding him. She wrests
herself free.]*

Marian.

Keep back, I warn you !

John [advancing slowly]. Strike, now strike if you will.

You will not like
To see the red blood spurting up your hand.
That's not maid's work. Come, strike !

[ROBIN HOOD *appears at the edge of the glade
behind him.*

You see, you cannot !

Your heart is tenderer than you think.

Robin [quietly].

Prince John !

John [turns round and confronts ROBIN]. Out with your
blade, Warman.

[ROBIN *draws his sword and sets his back to
an oak. The other two followers of PRINCE
JOHN come out of the wood.*

Robin.

Come on, all four !

You must be tired of fighting women-folk.
Come on ! By God, sir, you must guard your head
Better than that.

[*He disarms WARMAN.*

Or you're just food for worms
Already ; come, you dogs !

John.

Work round, you three,
Behind him ! Drive him out from that damned oak !

Robin. Oh, that's a princely speech ! Have at you, sir !

[He strikes PRINCE JOHN'S sword out of his hand, and turns suddenly to confront the others. JOHN picks up a dagger and makes as if to stab ROBIN in the back. At the same instant bugles are heard in the distance. The red-cross knight flashes between the trees, and seizing JOHN'S arm in his gauntleted hand, disarms him, then turns to help ROBIN.]

Knight. What, four on one ! Down with your blades, you curs,
Or, by Mahound !—

[The three men take to flight. JOHN stands staring at the new-comer. The foresters appear, surrounding the glade.]

John *[muttering]*. What ? Thou ? Thou ? Or his ghost ?
No—no—it cannot be.

Robin. Let them yelp home.
All's well ; but take this villain into the cave
And guard him there.

[The foresters lead PRINCE JOHN into the cave.]

John *[to the foresters]*. Answer me one thing ; who
Is yonder red-cross knight ?

A Forester.
Whoever he be !

No friend of thine,

Knight [to *Robin*]. I need not ask *his* name.
I grieve to know it !

Robin. Sir, I am much beholden
To your good chivalry. What thanks is mine
To give is all your own.

Knight. Then I ask this !
Give me that prisoner ! I think his life is mine !

Robin. You saved my own, and more, you saved much
more
Than my poor life is worth. But, sir, think well !
This man is dangerous, not to me alone,
But to the King of England.

Knight. I have more reasons than you know.

Robin. So be it.
Bring back the prisoner !

[*The foresters bring PRINCE JOHN back. He
stares at the KNIGHT as if in fear.*]

Sir, you shall judge him.
This prisoner is your own.

Knight. Then—let him go !

Foresters. What ! Set him free ?

Robin. Obey !

[*They release PRINCE JOHN.*]

Knight. Out of my sight ;
Go !

Prince John. What man is this ?

Knight.

Quickly, get thee gone !

[PRINCE JOHN goes out, shaken and white.]

Robin. We'll think no more of him ! It is our rule
That every friend we meet in merry greenwood
Should dine with us. Will you not be our guest ?

Knight. That's a most happy thought ! I have not
heard
A merrier word than dinner all this day.

Robin. Will you not raise your visor,
And let us know to whose good knightly hand
We are so beholden ?

Knight. Sir, you will pardon me
If, for a little, I remain unknown. .
But, tell me, are you not that Robin Hood
Who breaks the forest laws ?

Robin. That is my name.
We hold this earth as naturally our own
As the glad common air we breathe. We think
No man, no king, can so usurp the world
As not to give us room to live free lives,
But, if you shrink from eating the King's deer—

Knight. Shrink ? Ha ! ha ! ha ! I count it as my
own !

[*The foresters appear, preparing the dinner on a table of green turfs beneath a spreading oak. MARIAN and JENNY appear at the door of the hut. JENNY goes across to help at the preparations for dinner.*]

Robin. Ah, there's my Lady Marian ! Will you not
come
And speak with her ?

*[He and the KNIGHT go and talk to MARIAN
in the background.]*

Little John [at the table]. The trenchers all are set ;
Manchetts of wheat, cream, curds, and honey-cakes,
Venison pasties, roasted pigeons ! Much,
Run to the cave ; we'll broach our rarest wine
To-day.

*Enter FRIAR TUCK with several more foresters and
WILL SCARLET.*

Robin. Will Scarlet ! And all in time for dinner !
Go into the hut. Thy mother is waiting there.
Put thy big arm around her.

[WILL SCARLET goes into the hut with a cry.]

Scarlet. Mother !

Friar Tuck. You see,
My sons, you couldn't expect the lad to run !
There is a certain looseness in the limbs,
A quaking of the flesh that overcomes
The bravest who has felt a hangman's rope
Cuddling his neck.

Robin. You judge him by the rope
That cuddles your slim waist ! Oh, you sweet armful,
Sit down and pant ! I warrant you were glad
To bear him company.

Friar Tuck. I'll not deny it !
I am a man of solids. Like the Church
I am founded on a rock.

[*He sits down.*]

Robin. Solids, i' faith !
Sir, it is true he is partly based on beef ;
He grapples with it squarely ; but fluids, too,
Have played their part in that cathedral choir
He calls his throat. One godless virtue, sir,
They seem to have given him. Never a nightingale
Gurgles jug ! jug ! in mellower tones than he
When jugs are flowing. Never a thrush can pipe
Sweet, sweet, so rarely as, when a pipe of wine
Summers his throttle, we'll make him sing to us
One of his heathen ditties—*The Malmsey Butt,*
Or Down the Merry Red Lane !

Jenny [*approaching*]. Please you, sirs, all is ready !

Friar Tuck. Ah, Jenny, Jenny, Jenny, that's good news !

[*WILL SCARLET comes out of the hut with his arm round his mother. They all sit down at the table of turfs.*]

Enter SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF timidly.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Is there a place for me ?

A Forester.

Ay, come along !

Friar Tuck. Now, Robin, don't forget the grace, my son.

Robin [*standing up*]. It is our custom, sir, since our repast
Is borrowed from the King, to drain one cup
To him, and his return from the Crusade,
Before we dine. That same wine-bibbing friar
Calls it our "grace"; and constitutes himself
Remembrancer—without a cause, for never
Have we forgotten, never while bugles ring
Thro' Sherwood, shall forget—Outlaws, the King!

[*All stand up except the KNIGHT.*]

Cries. The King and his return from the Crusade!

[*They drink and resume their seats.*]

Robin. You did not drink the health, sir Knight. I
hope
You hold with Lion-Heart.

Knight. Yes; I hold with him.
You were too quick for me. I had not drawn
These gauntlets off.

But tell me, Lady Marian,
When is your bridal day with Robin Hood?

Marian. We shall be wedded when the King comes
home
From the Crusade.

Knight. Ah, when the King comes home!
That's music—all the birds of April sing
In those four words for me—the King comes home.

Marian. I am glad you love him, sir.

Robin. But you're not eating !
Your helmet's locked and barred. Will you not raise
Your visor ?

Knight. Or lose my dinner ! Hunger and thirst
Break down all masks and all disguises, Robin.

[*He rises and removes his helmet, revealing the
face of* RICHARD CŒUR DE LION.

Robin. The King !

[*They all leap to their feet.*

Outlaws. The King ! The King !

Robin. But oh, my liege,
I should have known, at the rescue of Will Scarlet,
When we were so outnumbered and hard beset,
And you came riding out of the Eastern sky,
I should have known, either it was Saint George
Or else the King come home from the Crusade.

Richard. A lover's instinct might have told you, Robin,
If, as I understand, it means so much
To you and Lady Marian. Huntingdon,
Your earldom we restore to you this day.
You and my Lady Marian shall return
To court with us, where your true bridal troth
Shall be fulfilled with golden marriage bells.
Now, friends, the venison pasty. We must hear
The *Malmsey Butt* and *Down the Merry Red Lane*.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Don't leave the forest. There's
darker things to come.

Robin. Pardon him, sire. Poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf has
lost
His mortal wits.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Sire, you will pardon me,
For I am only a fool, and yet, methinks,
You know not half the meaning of those words—
The King, the King comes home from the Crusade !
Thrust up your swords, hilt uppermost, my lads,
And shout—the King comes home from the Crusade.

[*He leaps on a seat, and thrusts up the KING'S sword, hilt uppermost, as if it were a cross.*

Robin. Shadow-of-a-Leaf, this fooling goes too far.
Put down that sword.

[*SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF descends, slowly, kisses the hilt, lays down the sword, and steals aside into the fern.*

Richard. Now, friends, the venison pasty.

[*They gather round the table. SHADOW-OF A-LEAF flings himself down before a hawthorn-tree, and cries, as if in grief—*

O, Whisper of Thorns, the King, the
King comes home.

ACT IV.

SCENE I.—GARDEN OF THE KING'S PALACE.

Enter JOHN and ELINOR.

Elinor. You will be king the sooner. Not a month
In England, and our royal Lion-Heart
Ramps overseas again. That happy pair,
Huntingdon and his bride, must bless the star
Of errant knighthood.

John. He stayed just long enough
To let them pass one fearless honeymoon
In the broad sunlight of his royal favour,
Then, like a meteor, off goes great King Richard,
And leaves them but the shadow of his name
To shelter them from my revenge. They know it!
I have seen her shiver like a startled fawn
And draw him closer, damn him, as I passed.

Elinor. They would have flitted to the woods again
But for my Lord Fitzwalter.

John. That old fool
Has wits enough to know I shall be king.
If Richard were to perish overseas,
I'd . . .

Elinor. You'd be king the sooner. Never fear :
These wandering meteors flash into their graves
Like lightning, and no thunder follows them
To warn their foolish henchmen.

John [*looking at her searchingly*]. Shall I risk
The King's return ?

Elinor. What do you mean ?

John. I mean
I have borne enough from this damned Huntingdon.
He gave me like a fairing to my brother
In Sherwood Forest. Had it not been for you
He would have died ere this !

Elinor. Then let him die !

John. Oh, ay, but do you mean it, sister ?

Elinor. God,
I hate him, hate him !

John. Sister, he goes at noon
To Sherwood Forest, with a bag of gold
For some of his old followers. If by chance
He fall—how saith the Scripture ?—among thieves,
I think Suspicion scarce could lift her head
Among these roses here to hiss at me
When Lion-Heart returns.

Elinor. Vanish ?

John. I would not
Kill him too quickly. I would have him taken
To a stronghold that I know.

Elinor. You have laid your trap
Already? Tell me. You need not be afraid!
I saw them kiss, in the garden, yesternight;
And I have wondered, ever since, if fire
Could make a brand quite hot enough to stamp
My hate upon him.

John. Look, there our lovers come
Under that arch of roses. Look! God's angels!
They are taking leave of one another now.
A ghastly heart-wrench, for he will be gone
Well-nigh four hours, they think.

Elinor. To look at them
One might suppose they knew. Come, or my hate
Will show itself in my face.

[*Exeunt* PRINCE JOHN and ELINOR.]

Robin. Good-bye, once more,
Sweetheart.

Marian. Four hours. How shall I pass the time?
Four hours, four ages, you will scarce be home
By dusk. How shall I pass it?

Robin. You've to think
What robe to wear at the great masque to-night,
And then to don it. When you've done all that,
I shall be home again.

Marian. It is a month
To-day since we were married. Did you know it?
Fie! I believe you had forgotten, Robin.

Robin. I wish that we could chain old Father Time.

Marian. And break his glass into ten thousand pieces.

Robin. And drown his cruel scythe ten fathom deep
Under the shining sea whence Love was born.

Marian. Come back, come back, before the masque
begins.

Robin. Ay, or a little later, never fear.
You'll not so easily lose me.

Marian. I shall count
The minutes.

Robin. Why, you're trembling.

Marian. Yes, I am foolish.
This is the first small parting we have had.
But—you'll be back ere dusk. The skies are cloudy.
There'll be no stars to guide you through the forest.

Robin. O, clear bright eyes, dear heavens of sweeter
stars
Where angels play, and your own sweeter soul
Smiles like a child into the face of God . . .
What could I lack, with you to lead me home?
Good-bye, dear heart, good-bye.

Marian. Good-bye !

[*He goes hurriedly out. She looks after him
for a moment, then suddenly calls.*

Robin !

[*She stands looking after him.*

SCENE II.—SHERWOOD FOREST : DUSK.

Outside the cave, as in the second act. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF runs quickly across the glade, followed by BRAMBLE-SCRATCH.

Bramble-Scratch. Shadow-of-a-Leaf ! Shadow-of-a-Leaf ! Shadow-of-a-Leaf !
Don't dance away like that ; don't hop ; don't skip
Like that, I tell you ! I'll never do it again,
I promise. Don't be silly now ! Come here ;
I want to tell you something.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Now, Master Bramble-Scratch,
You'll kindly keep your word ! A foxglove spray
In the right hand is deadlier than the sword
That mortals use, and one resounding thwack
Applied to your slim browniehood's green limbs
Will make it painful, painful, very painful,
Next time your worship wishes to sit down
Cross-legged upon a mushroom.

Bramble-Scratch. Ha ! ha ! ha !
Poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf !

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. You keep your word, that's all !

Bramble-Scratch. Haven't I kept my word ? Wasn't
it I
That made you what these poor dull mortals call
Crazy ? *Who* crowned you with the cap and bells ?
Who made you such a hopeless glorious fool,
That wise men are afraid of every word
You utter ? Wasn't it I that made you free

Of the Shining Glen—that showed you how to pluck
Fern-seed by moonlight, and to walk and talk
Between the lights with urchins and with elves ?
Is there another fool twixt earth and heaven
Like you—ungrateful rogue—answer me that !

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. All true, dear gossip, and for saving
me

From the poor game of blind man's buff men call
Wisdom, I thank you ; but to hang and buzz
Like a mad dragon-fly, now on my nose,
Now on my neck, now singing in my ears,
Is *that* to make me free of the Shining Glen ?
No—that's enough to make the poor fool mad
And take to human wisdom.

Bramble-Scratch. Yet you love me,
Ha ! ha !—you love me more than all the rest.
You can't deny it ! You can't deny it ! Ha ! ha !

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. I won't deny it, gossip. E'en as I
think

There must be something loves us creatures more
Than any churchmen say. We are so teased
With thorns, bullied with briars, baffled with stars.
I've lain sometimes and laughed until I cried
To see the round moon rising over these trees
With that same foolish face of heavenly mirth
Winking at lovers in the bluebell glade.

Bramble-Scratch. Hist, who comes here ?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Scarlet and Little John,
And all the merry men—not half so merry
Since Robin went away. He was to come
And judge between the rich and poor to-day.
I think he has forgotten.

Bramble-Scratch. Hist, let me hide
Behind this hawthorn bush till they are gone.

[*Enter the foresters—they all go into the cave except SCARLET and LITTLE JOHN, who stand at the entrance, looking anxiously back.*]

Little John. I have never known the time when Robin
Hood
Said “ I will surely come,” and hath not been
Punctual as yonder evening star.

Scarlet. Pray God
No harm hath fallen him. Indeed, he said,
“ Count on my coming.”

Little John. I'll sound yet one more call.
They say these Courts will spoil a forester.
It may be he has missed the way. I'd give
My sword-hand just to hear his jolly bugle
Answer me.

[*He blows a forest call. They listen. All is silent.*]

Scarlet. Silence—only the sough of leaves !

Little John. Well, I'm for sleep : the moon is not so
bright
Since Robin left us.

Scarlet. Ha ! Shadow-of-a-Leaf, alone ?
I thought I heard thy voice.

Little John. Oh, he will talk
With ferns and flowers and whisper to the mice !
Perfectly happy, art thou not, dear fool ?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Perfectly happy since I lost my wits !

Scarlet. Pray that thou never dost regain them, then, *Shadow-of-a-Leaf.*

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. I thank you kindly, sir,
And pray that you may quickly lose your own,
And so be happy too.

Scarlet. Good-night, good fool.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. I wish you both
A bad night that will tease your wits away
And make you happy.

[*The outlaws enter the cave.* SHADOW-OF-A-
LEAF beckons to BRAMBLE-SCRATCH, who
steals out again.

Bramble-Scratch. *Shadow-of-a-Leaf*, some change
Is creeping over the forest. I myself
Scarce laugh so much since Robin went away !
Oh, my head hangs heavily as a violet
Brimmed with the rain. *Shadow-of-a-Leaf*, a cloud,
A whisper steals across this listening wood !
I am growing afraid. Dear fool, I am thy crony,
But I am growing afraid there comes an end
To all our Sherwood revels, and I shall never
Tease thee again.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Here comes the unknown King !

Enter THORN-WHISPER.

King of the forest sprites, I strew ferns before you.
There are no palms here : ferns do just as well !

Thorn-Whisper. Shadow-of-a-Leaf, our battles all are
wasted ;
Our fairy dreams whereby we strove to warn
Robin and Marian, wasted. Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Dear Robin Hood, the lover of the poor,
And kind Maid Marian, his forest queen,
Are in the toils at last.

[*He pauses.*]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Speak ! speak !

Thorn-Whisper. Prince John
Hath trapped and taken Robin.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Is not Richard
King of this England ? Did not Richard swear
That Robin should be Earl of Huntingdon
And hold his lands in safety ? These wise men
Fight too much for their holy sepulchres !
Are not the living images of God
Better than empty graves ?

Thorn-Whisper. One grave is filled
Now ; for our fairy couriers have brought
Tidings that Richard Lion-Heart is dead.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Dead ?

Thorn-Whisper. Dead ! In a few brief hours the news
will reach
The wicked Prince. He will be King of England !

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. No way to save them. Spirit of
the thorns,
I, Shadow-of-a-Leaf, the Fool, must break my vows,
I must save Robin Hood.

Thorn-Whisper. Shadow-of-a-Leaf,
Think what death means to you, never to join
Our happy sports again, never to see
The moonlight streaming through these ancient oaks
Again, never to pass our shining gates
Again. We cannot help it. They will close
Like iron in your face, and you will hear
Our happy songs within ; but you will lie
Alone, without.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. So be it. I shall see them entering
in !
The time is brief. Quick, tell me, where is Robin ?

Thorn-Whisper. Thrust in the great Dark Tower be-
yond the wood,
The topmost cell where foot can never climb.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Cannot an arrow reach it ? Swift,
be swift ;
Come, lead me thither.

SCENE III.—THE DARK TOWER.

ROBIN *bound.* PRINCE JOHN *and two mercenaries.* A
low narrow door in the background, small barred
window on the left.

Prince John [to the mercenaries]. Leave us a moment.
I have private matters
To lay before this friend of all the poor.
You may begin to build the door up now,
So that you do not wall me in with him.

*[The two men go out, and the clash of
trowels on stone is heard from time to
time outside the door.]*

So now, my good green foot-pad, you are trapped
At last, trapped in the practice of your trade !
Trapped, as you took your stolen Norman gold
To what was it—a widow, or Saxon serf,
With eyes put out for breaking forest laws ?
You hold with them, it seems. Your dainty soul
Sickens at our gross penalties ; and so
We'll not inflict them on your noble self,
Although we have the power. There's not a soul
Can ever tell where Robin Hood is gone.
These walls will never echo it.

[He taps the wall with his sword.]

And yet
There surely must be finer ways to torture
So fine a soul as yours. Was it not you
Who gave me like a fairing to my brother
With lofty condescension in your eyes ;
And shall I call my tongueless devils in
And bid them burn your eyes out with hot irons ?
Richard is gone—he'll never hear of it !
An earl that plays the robber disappears,
That's all. Most like he died in some low scuffle
Over his ale-cups. I am half inclined
To call for red-hot irons after all,
So that your sympathy with Saxon churls
May be more deep, you understand ; and then
It would be sweet for you, alone and blind,
To know that you could never in this life
See Marian's face again. But no—that's bad,
Bad art to put hope's eyes out. It destroys
Half a man's fear to rob him of his hope.
No ; you shall drink the dregs of it. Hope shall die
More exquisite a death. Robin, my friend,
You understand that, when I quit your presence,

This bare blank cell becomes your living tomb.
Do you not comprehend ? It's none so hard.
The doorway will be built up. There will be
No door, you understand, but just a wall,
Some six feet thick, of solid masonry.
Nobody will disturb you, even to bring
Water or food. You'll starve—see—like a rat,
Bricked up and buried. But you'll have time to think
Of how I tread a measure at the masque
To-night, with Marian, while her wide eyes wonder
Where Robin is—and old Fitzwalter smiles
And bids his girl be gracious to the Prince
For his land's sake. Ah, ha ! you wince at that !
Will you not speak a word before I go ?
Speak, damn you !

[He strikes ROBIN across the face with his glove. ROBIN remains silent.]

Six days hence, if you keep watch
At yonder window (you'll be hungry then),
You may catch sight of Marian and Prince John
Wandering into the gardens down below.
You will be hungry then ; perhaps you'll strive
To call to us, or stretch a meagre arm
Through those strong bars ; but then you know the
height

Is very great—no voice can reach to the earth.
This is the topmost cell in my Dark Tower.
Men look like ants below there. I shall say
To Marian, see that creature waving there
High up above us, level with the clouds,
Is it not like a winter-shrivelled fly ?
And she will laugh ; and I will pluck her roses.
And then—and then—there are a hundred ways,
You know, to touch a woman's blood with thoughts

Beyond its lawful limits. Ha ! ha ! ha !
By God, you almost spoke to me, I think.
Touches at twilight, whispers in the dark,
Sweet sympathetic murmurs o'er the loss
Of her so thoughtless Robin, do you think
Maid Marian will be quite so hard to win
When princes come to woo ? There will be none
To interrupt us then. Time will be mine
To practise all the amorous arts of Ovid,
And, at the last—

Robin. Will you not free my hands ?
You have your sword. But I would like to fight you
Here, with my naked hands. I want no more.

Prince John. Ha ! ha ! At last the sullen speaks.
That's all
I wanted. I have struck you in the face.
Is't not enough ? You can't repay that blow.

Robin. Bury me down in hell and I'll repay it
The day you die, across your lying mouth
That spoke of my true lady, I will repay it,
Before the face of God !

Prince John [laughing]. Meanwhile, for me
Till you repay that blow, there is the mouth
Of Marian, the sweet honey-making mouth
That shall forestall your phantom blow with balm.
Oh, you'll go mad too soon if I delay.
I am glad you spoke. Farewell, the masons wait.
And I must not be late for Marian.

[Exit through the small aperture now left in
the doorway. It is rapidly closed, and
sounds of heavy masonry being piled against
it are heard. ROBIN tries to free his hands,

and after an effort succeeds. He hurls himself against the door, and finds it hopeless. He turns to the window, peers through it for a moment, then suddenly unwinds a scarf from his neck, ties it to one of the bars, and stands to one side.

Robin. Too high a shot for most of my good bowmen !
What's that ? A miss ?

[He looks thro' the window.

Good lad, he'll try again !

[He stands at the side once more, and an arrow comes thro' the window.

Why, that's like magic !

[He pulls up the thread attached to it.

Softly, or 'twill break !—

Ah, now 'tis sturdy cord.

I'll make it fast.

But how to break these bars !

St Nicholas,

There's some one climbing. He must have a head

Of iron, and the lightness of a cat !

Downward is bad enough, but up is more

Than mortal ! Who the devil can it be ?

Thank God, it's growing dark. But what a risk !

None of my merry men could e'en attempt it.

I'm very sure it can't be Little John.

What, Shadow-of-a-Leaf !

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF appears at the window.

'Fore God, dear faithful fool,

I am glad to see you.

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Softly, gossip, softly,
Pull up the rope a little until we break
This bar away—or some kind friend may see
The dangling end below. Now here's a toothpick,
Six inches of grey steel, for you to work with,
And here's another for me. Pick out the mortar !

[They work to loosen the bars.]

Wait ! Here's a rose I brought you in my cap,
And here's a spray of fern ! Old Nature's keys
Open all prisons. I'll throw them in for luck,

[He throws them into the cell, and begins working feverishly again.]

So that the princes of the world may know
The forest let you out. Down there on earth,
If any sees me, they will only think'
The creepers are in leaf. Pick out the mortar !
That's how the greenwood works. You know, 'twill
thrust

Its tendrils through these big grey stones one day
And pull them down. I noticed in the courtyard
The grass is creeping through the crevices
Already, and yellow dandelions crouch
In all the crumbling corners. Pick it out !
This is a very righteous work indeed
For men in Lincoln green ; for what are we
But tendrils of old Nature, herald sprays.
We scarce anticipate. Pick the mortar out.
Quick, there's no time to lose, although to-night
We're in advance of sun and moon and stars
And all the trickling sands in Time's turned glass.

[With a sudden cry.]

Richard is dead !

Robin. Richard is dead ! The King
Is dead !

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Ah, dead ! Come, pick the mortar
out,
Out of the walls of towers and shrines and tombs.
For now Prince John is King, and Lady Marian
In peril, gossip ! Yet we are in advance
Of sun and moon to-night, for sweet Prince John
Is not aware yet of his kinglihood,
Or of his brother's death.

Robin [*pausing a moment*]. Why, *Shadow-of-a-Leaf*,
What does this mean ?

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Come, pick the mortar out ;
You have no time to lose. This very night
My Lady Marian must away to Sherwood.
At any moment the dread word may come
That makes John King of England. Quick, be quick !

Robin. She is at the masque to-night !

Shadow-of-a-Leaf. Then you must mask
And fetch her thence. Ah, ha, the bar works loose.
Pull it.

[*They pull at the bar, get it free, and throw it
into the cell.*]

Now, master, follow me down the rope.

[*Exit ROBIN thro' the window.*]

SCENE IV.—NIGHT.

The garden of the King's palace (as before), but lighted with torches for the masque. Music swells up and dies away continually. Maskers pass to and fro between the palace and the garden. On the broad terrace in front some of them are dancing a galliard.

PRINCE JOHN *enters, and is met by ELINOR, neither of them masked.*

Elinor. All safe ?

Prince John. Ay, buried and bricked up now, to think Alone, in the black night, of all I told him.
Thank God, we have heard the last of Robin Hood.

Elinor [*putting on her mask*]. You are sure ?

Prince John. I saw him entombed with my own eyes.
Six feet of solid masonry.
Where is my Lady Marian ? Ah, I see her !
With that old hypocrite, Fitzwalter.

[*They part.* PRINCE JOHN *puts on his mask as he goes.*

A Lady.
Where is Prince John ?

But tell me

A Masker. That burly-shouldered man
By yonder pillar, talking with old Fitzwalter,
And the masked girl, in green, with red-gold hair,
Is Lady Marian !

The Lady. Where is Robin Hood ?

Masker. I know not ; but he'd better have a care
Of Mistress Marian. If I know Prince John
He has marked her for his own.

The Lady. I cannot see
What fascinates him.

Masker. No, you are right, nor I.

Prince John. Come, Lady Marian, let me lead you out
To tread a measure.

Marian. Pray, sir, pardon me !
I am tired.

Fitzwalter [*whispering angrily to her*]. Now, Marian, be
not so ungracious.

Marian. I will do what you will. Lead, lead your
dance.

[*Exeunt JOHN and MARIAN.*]

A Masker [*to a lady, as they come up from the garden*].
Will you not let me see your face now, sweet ?

Lady. You hurt my lip with that last kiss of yours.
Hush, do not lean your face so close, I pray you ;
Loosen my fingers. There's my lord.

Second Masker. Where ? Where ?
Now, if I know him, I shall know your name !

[*They pass out talking.*]

[*The music swells up and more dancers appear.*]

Enter ROBIN HOOD, *still in his forester's garb, but wearing a mask. He walks as if wounded and in pain. He sits down in the shadow of a pillar watching, and partly concealed from the throng.*

Third Lady. Remember now to say you did not see me Here at the masque.

Third Masker. Or shall I say that I Was out in Palestine ?

[They pass.]

Enter PRINCE ARTHUR. *He comes up to*
ROBIN HOOD.

Arthur. Are you not Robin Hood ?

Robin. You have bright eyes, Prince Arthur ; but
to-night
You must not know me. You see I wear a mask
Like all the rest to-night ?

Arthur. Why do they wear
Masks ?

Robin. They must always wear some sort of mask
At court. Sometimes they wear them all their lives.

Arthur. You are jesting, Robin. Now I wanted you
To tell me tales of Sherwood. Tell me how
You saved Will Scarlet.

Robin. Why, I've told you that
A score of times.

Arthur. I know, I want to hear it
Again. Well, tell me of that afternoon

When Lion-Heart came home from the Crusade.
I have often thought of that. It must have been
Like magic ! You weren't expecting it at all ?

Robin. No, not at all ; but, Arthur, tell me first
Have you seen Lady Marian ?

Arthur. Yes, I saw her
Treading a measure with my Uncle John.

Robin. Stand where you are and watch ; and, if you
see her,
Beckon her. Then I'll tell you how the King
Came home from the Crusade.

Arthur. First, let me tell you
Just how I think it was. It must have been
Like a great picture. All your outlaws there
Sitting around your throne of turf, and you
Judging the rich and poor. That's how it was
Last night, I dreamed of it. Then there was a light
Between the trees, as if a star had come
Down to the earth and caught among the boughs,
With beams like big soft swords amongst the ferns
And leaves, and through the light a great white charger
Stepped, and the King came home from the Crusade.
Was it like that ? Was there a shining light ?

Robin. I think there must have been, a blinding light.

Arthur. Filling an arch of leaves ?

Robin. Yes.

Arthur. That was it !
That's how the King came home from the Crusade.

Robin. But there—you've told the story.

Arthur.

Ah, not all !

Robin. No, not quite all. What's that ?

[The music abruptly stops. The maskers crowd together, whispering.]

Arthur. Why have they stopped
The music ? Ah, there's Hubert. Shall I ask him ?

Robin. Yes, quickly, and come back !

[ARTHUR runs up to a masker. Several go by hurriedly.]

First Masker.

The King is dead !

[ARTHUR returns.]

Arthur. Robin, they say the King is dead ! So I
Am king now, am I not ?

Robin. Use your eyes, my boy,
Where's Lady Marian ?

Arthur. Ah, there she is at last,
Alone.

Robin. Go to her quickly, and bring her hither.

[ARTHUR runs off and returns with MARIAN.]

Marian. Robin, thank God—

Robin. You must away to Kirklee !
Shadow-of-a-Leaf is waiting by the orchard
With your white palfrey. I'll try to gain you time.
Go—quickly !

Marian. Robin, your face is white, you are wounded !
What's this—there's blood upon your doublet !
Robin !

Robin. Nothing ! Go, quickly !

Marian. Robin, I cannot leave you.

Robin. Go, Marian. If you ever loved me, go.

Marian. You'll follow ?

Robin. Oh, with my last breath I will,
God helping me ; but I must gain you time !
Quickly ! Here comes the King !

Marian. Oh, follow soon !

[*Exit.*

[*ROBIN sits down again, steadying himself
against the pillar. JOHN appears (at the
doors of the palace, above the terrace), a
scroll in his hand.*

John. My friends, the King is dead !

Maskers [*taking off their masks, with a cry*]. Long live
King John !

John [*coming down amongst them*]. Our masque is
ended by this grievous news ;
But where's my Lady Marian ? I had some word
To speak with her ! Not here ! Why—

Robin [*still masked, rises and confronts the King, who
stares at him and shrinks back a little*]. All the masks
Are off, sire ! No, perhaps they wear them still.

John. Who is this ?

Robin. One that was dead and lives. You say
Your brother, the great King, is dead. O, sire,
If that be so, you'll hear a dead man speak,
For your dead brother's sake. You say the King
Is dead ; but you are king. So the King lives !
You are King of England now from sea to sea,
Is it not so ? Shout, maskers, once again,
Long live the King !

Maskers. Long live the King !

Robin. You see
What power is yours !

[He draws nearer to JOHN, who still shrinks a little as if in fear.]

Richard, you say, is dead,
And yet, O King, I say that the great King
Lives !

[He strikes JOHN across the face. JOHN cowers and staggers back. The MASKERS draw their swords, the women scream and rush together. ROBIN turns, sword in hand, to confront the MASKERS.]

Back, fools ; for I say that the great King
Lives. Do not doubt it. You have dreamed him dead
How often. Hark, as God lives, you know that voice.

[A voice is heard drawing nearer thro' the distant darkness of the garden, singing. All listen.]

(*Song.*)

Knight, on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
"Onward," I heard him say,
"Love, to thy side."

Robin. 'Tis Blondel! Still vaunt-courier to the King,
As when he burst the bonds of Austria! Listen!

(*Song nearer.*)

"Nay," sang a bird above,
"Stay, for I see
Death, in the mask of love,
Waiting for thee."

Maskers [*resuming their masks and muttering to one another*]. Can the King live? Is this John's treachery? Look,
He is crushed with fear!

Robin. Listen! I'll go to meet him.

[*Exit.*

Maskers. It was the song of Blondel! The same song
He made with Richard, long since!—

Blondel's voice!

Just as we heard it on that summer's night
When Lion-Heart came home from the Crusade.

[*The song still drawing nearer.*

"Death! What is Death?" he cried.

"I must ride on,
On to my true love's side,
Up to her throne!"

*Enter BLONDEL from the garden. He stands,
startled by the scene before him.*

Maskers. Blondel ! Where is the King ? Where is
the King ?

Blondel. Did ye not know ? Richard, the King, is
dead !

Maskers. Dead !

John. Dead ! And ye let the living dog escape
That dared snarl at our sovereignty. I know him,
Risen from the dead or not. I know 'twas he,
'Twas Robin Hood ! After him ! hunt him down !
Let him not live to greet another sun.
After him !

Maskers [*drawing their swords and plunging into the
darkness*]. After him ; hunt the villain down !

ACT V.

SCENE I.—A ROOM IN KIRKLEE PRIORY.

A window on the right overlooks a cloister leading up to the chapel door. The forest is seen in the distance, the sun beginning to set behind it. The PRIORESS and a NOVICE are sitting (in a window-seat) engaged in broidery work.

Novice. He must be a good man—this Robin Hood !
I long to see him. Father used to say
England had known none like him since the days
Of Hereward the Wake.

Prioress. He will be here
By vespers. You shall let him in. Who's that ?
Can that be he ? It is not sundown yet.
See who is there.

[*Exit NOVICE. She returns excitedly.*

Novice. A lady asks to see you !
She is robed like any nun ; but, on her breast,
Under her cloak, I saw a fiery snake
Of rubies, like the jewel that I have heard
The king's own sister wears.

Prioress. It cannot be ;
And yet—I have heard strange whispers. Bring her in
Quickly.

*[Exit NOVICE, and returns with ELINOR in a
nun's garb. At a sign from the PRIORESS
the NOVICE retires.]*

Elinor. Mother, I come to beg a favour.
I am a friend of Robin Hood. I have heard—
One of his foresters, this very noon
Brought me the news—that he is sorely wounded ;
And purposes to seek your kindly help
At Kirklee Priory.

Prioress. Oh, then indeed,
You must be a great friend, for this was kept
Most secret from all others.

Elinor. I have some skill
In wounds, and so may help him.

Prioress. You shall see him.
(I have some skill myself in balms and simples,
But in these deadlier matters I would fain
Trust to your knowledge.)

Elinor. Let me see him alone ;
You understand.

[A bell begins tolling slowly.]

Prioress. The bell for even-song !
You have not long to wait.

*[Shadowy figures of nuns pass the windows and
enter the chapel. The sunset deepens.]*

Will you not pray

With me ?

[The PRIORESS and ELINOR kneel down together before a little shrine.]

Enter the NOVICE.

Novice. There is a forester at the door.
Mother, I think 'tis he !

Prioress [rising]. Admit him, then.

Elinor. Leave me : I will keep praying till he comes.

Prioress. You are trembling ! You are not afraid ?

Elinor [with eyes closed as in strenuous devotion]. No,
no ;
Leave me, I am praying !

*[A chant swells up in the chapel. Exit PRIORESS.
ELINOR continues muttering as in prayer.
Enter ROBIN HOOD, steadying himself on
his bow, weak and white. She rises and
passes between him and the door to con-
front him.]*

Elinor. Ah, Robin, you have come to me at last
For healing.

Robin Hood [staring at her wildly]. You ! I did not
know that you
Were here. I did not ask your help.

*[He tries to reach the door, but reels on the
way. ELINOR supports him as he pauses,
panting for breath.]*

Elinor. Ah, Robin,
I have risked much to bring you help this day :
Trust me, Robin. I have some skill in wounds.
You cannot go ! You are fainting. Ah, rest here
Upon this couch.

[She half supports, half thrusts him back to a couch in an alcove out of sight and draws a curtain. There is a knock at the door.]

Elinor. Who's there ?

Prioress. Madam, I came
To know if I could help in anything.

Elinor. Nothing ! His blood runs languidly. It needs
The pricking of a vein to make the heart
Beat, and the sluggish rivers flow. I have brought
A lance for it. I'll let a little blood.
Not over-much ; enough, enough to set
The pulses throbbing.

Prioress. Lady Marian, madam,
Waits at the door, and asks—

Elinor. Let her not come
Near him till all is done. Let her not know
Anything, or the old fever will awake.
I'll lance his arm now !

[The PRIORESS closes the door. ELINOR goes into the alcove. The chant from the chapel swells up again. ELINOR comes out of the alcove, white and trembling. She speaks in a low whisper as she looks back.]

Now, trickle down, sweet blood. How very soon

The face turns grey. Grow white, grow white, fond lips.
And yet—she shall not boast she kissed you last.

[She kneels down as if to kiss the face of ROBIN. Within, the chant from the chapel swells up more loudly. The door slowly opens. MARIAN steals in. ELINOR rises and confronts her.]

Elinor [laying a hand upon ROBIN'S bow beside her].
Hush! Do not wake him!

Marian [in a low voice]. What have you done with him?

Elinor [as MARIAN advances towards the couch]. He is asleep.
Hush! Not a step farther! Stay where you are! His life
Hangs on a thread.

Marian. Why do you stare at me?
What have you done? What's this that trickles down—

[Stoops to the floor and leaps back with a scream.]

It is blood. You have killed him!

Elinor [draws her dagger and strikes. MARIAN falls].
Follow him—down to hell.
King John will find you there.

[Exit. The scene grows dark.]

Marian [lifts up her head with a groan]. I am dying,
Robin!

O God, I cannot wake him ! Robin ! Robin !
He will not wake !

[She falls back unconscious. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF, a green spray in his hand, opens the casement and stands for a moment in the window against the last glow of sunset, then enters and runs to the side of ROBIN.]

Shadow-of-a-Leaf *[hurriedly]*. Awake, Robin, awake !
The forest waits to help you ! All the leaves
Are listening for your bugle. Ah, where is it ?
Let but one echo sound and the wild flowers
Will break thro' these grey walls and the green sprays
Drag down these deadly towers. Wake, Robin, wake,
And let the forest drown the priest's grey song
With happy murmurs. Robin, the gates are open
For you and Marian !
Robin, awake ! awake !

[Exit lingeringly through the casement.]

Robin *[ROBIN is dimly seen in the mouth of the alcove. He stretches out his hands blindly in the dark.]*
Marian ! Why do you call to me ?

[He sees the dark body of MARIAN and utters a cry, falling on his knees beside her.]

Marian ! Marian !

My bugle ! Ah, my bugle !

[He rises to his feet, and drowning the distant organ-music, he blows a resounding forest-call. It is answered by several in the forest. He falls on his knees by MARIAN and takes her in his arms.]

O Marian, Marian, who hath used thee so ?
Marian, Marian, what have they done to thee ?

*[The outlaws are heard thundering at the gates
with cries.]*

Outlaws. Robin ! Robin ! Robin ! Break down the
doors.

*[The terrified nuns stream past the window out
of the chapel. The outlaws rush into the
room. The scene still darkens.]*

Scarlet. Robin and Marian !

Little John. Christ, what devil's hand
Hath played the butcher here ? Quick, hunt them down,
They passed out yonder. Let them not outlive
Our murdered king and queen. O Robin, Robin,
Who shot this bitter shaft into her breast ?

[They kneel by the lovers.]

Robin. Speak to me, Marian, only speak !

Scarlet.
Shall burn for this !

Kirklee

Robin. No. Help me to stand up.
Give me my bow. There is another way.
'Twas Shadow-of-a-Leaf that told me. I must shoot
My last blind arrow at the setting sun ;
Never to reach it ; but where this last bolt
Of all my strength, hope, love, shall fall, there lay us

Together, and cover us with the forest fern.
Now, help me to the window. Quick ! The bow !

[SCARLET gives him the bow. He stands against the faint glow of the window, draws the bow slowly to full length, shoots, and falls back into the arms of LITTLE JOHN. The scene becomes quite dark. Then, out of the darkness, a glade in Sherwood begins to be visible by the soft light of the gates of the Shining Glen, which are swinging open once more among the ferns. The bodies of ROBIN and MARIAN are seen to the left of the glade. THORN-WHISPER and FERN-WHISPER steal over to them.]

Fern-Whisper. The foresters have laid their bodies here
And covered them with ferns. They call them dead.

Thorn-Whisper. They'll dig their grave to-morrow.

Fern-Whisper. O, Whisper of Thorns,
What is this death ?

Thorn-Whisper. A sleep—and an awakening !
But these may dream their lover's dream in death,
And enter into the Shining Glen to-night,
Before they wake to that new lovely life
Beyond the shadows.

Our poor Shadow-of-a-Leaf
Is there, within. He is paying the dreadful price
Even now, in the Shining Glen, to give them this.

Fern-Whisper. But Shadow-of-a-Leaf ?

Thorn-Whisper. The gates
Will close against him now.

Fern-Whisper. Is this for ever ?

Thorn-Whisper. O, Whisper of Ferns, we have not known or heard

What waits for those who like this wandering fool
Throw all away for love. But I have heard
There is a great King, out beyond the world,
Not Richard, who is dead, nor yet King John,
But a great King who one day will come home
Clothed with the clouds of heaven from His Crusade.

Fern-Whisper. The great King !

Thorn-Whisper. Hush, the voice of Shadow-of-a-Leaf !
He has paid the price. He is coming to let them in.

[Out of the darkness, and as if at a distance, the voice of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF is heard chanting the forest-song in monotone, rather than singing it, against the faintly throbbing music within the gates. It grows ecstatically triumphant as he approaches.]

(Song of SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF.)

I.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !
The Forest has conquered !
The world begins again !
And Oh, the red of the roses,
And the rush of the healing rain !

II.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !
The Forest has conquered !
The Princess wakes from sleep ;
For the soft green keys of the woodland
Have opened her donjon-keep !

III.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

 Their grey walls hemmed us round ;

But, under my greenwood oceans,

 Their castles are trampled and drowned.

IV.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

 My green sprays climbed on high,

And the ivy laid hold on their turrets

 And haled them down from the sky !

V.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

 They were strong ! They are overthrown,

For the little soft hands of the wild-flowers

 Have broken them, stone by stone.

VI.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

 Though Robin lie dead, lie dead,

And the green turf by Kirklee

 Lie light over Marian's head.

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *comes slowly out of the
Shining Glen.*

VII.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

The rose o'er the fortalice floats !

My nightingales chant in their chapels,

My lilies have bridged their moats !

VIII.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

King Death, in the light of the sun,

Shrinks like an elfin shadow !

His reign is over and done !

[SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF *stoops over the dead lovers
and touches them. His voice sinks from
triumph to a whisper as their shining forms
slowly rise.*

IX.

The hawthorn whitens the woodland ;

My lovers, awake, awake,

Shake off the grass-green coverlet,

Glide, bare-foot, thro' the brake !

X.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !

The Forest has conquered !

And, under the great green boughs,

I have found out a place for my lovers,

I have built them a beautiful house.

XI.

Green ferns in the dawn-red dew-fall,
 This gift by my death I give,—
They shall wander immortal thro' Sherwood !
 In my bird-loved glens they shall live !

XII.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !
The Forest has conquered !
 When the first wind blows from the south,
They shall meet by the Gates of Faerie !
 She shall set her mouth to his mouth !

XIII.

He shall gather her, fold her, and keep her ;
 They shall pass thro' the Gates, they shall live !
For the Forest, the Forest has conquered !
 This gift by my death I give !

XIV.

The Forest has conquered ! The Forest has conquered !
The Forest has conquered !
 The world awakes anew ;
And Oh, the scent of the hawthorn,
 And the drip of the healing dew !

*[During the latter part of the song, the shining
forms of ROBIN and MARIAN have left the
dark bodies like cast-off garments at their*

feet, THORN-WHISPER and FERN-WHISPER leading them; and they pass, hand in hand, through the gates of the Shining Glen. SHADOW-OF-A-LEAF holds his arms out in dumb longing. The gates close in his face. He sinks to his knees and holds up his hands against them, looking like a greenwood spray against their soft ivory glow. Immediately a voice is heard singing, and drawing nearer through the forest.

(Song—drawing nearer.)

Knight on the narrow way,
Where wouldst thou ride?
“Onward,” I heard him say,
“Love, to thy side!”
“Nay,” sang a bird above,
“Stay, for I see
Death in the mask of love
Waiting for thee.”

Enter BLONDEL, leading a great white steed. He stops and looks at the kneeling figure.

Blondel. Shadow-of-a-Leaf!

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [rising to his feet]. Blondel!

Blondel.
My King!

I go to seek

Shadow-of-a-Leaf [in passionate grief]. The King is dead!

Blondel [in yet more passionate joy and triumph]. The great King lives !

[*Then more tenderly.*

Will you not come and look for Him with me ?

[*They go slowly together through the forest and are lost to sight. BLONDEL'S voice is heard singing in the distance, farther and farther away.*

" Now till the end," he saith,

" All fear is gone.

Love, in the mask of Death,

Leadeth me on."

